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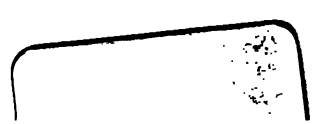

FIGHTING THE AIR.

VOL. III.

FIGHTING THE AIR.

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF

'LOVE'S CONFLICT,' 'VÉRONIQUE,' ETC. ETC.

'Give me something to meet and to fight;
I faint with fighting these things of air.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1875.

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251 . b . 87

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

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FIGHTING THE AIR.

CHAPTER I.

THE DESOLATED HEARTH.

MARGARITA was the first to recover herself. She was the first to check her stifling sobs, and wipe the torrent from her eyes, and try to impart some strength and comfort to her husband.

'We know the worst now, Laurence,' she said. 'Let us try to look it boldly in the face. Unintentionally we have committed a great error, but though the world may deem it irremediable, God does not; and the only question we have now to consider is, what is the right thing for us to do?'

'If we are to part,' he answered in a hard, dull voice, 'I don't care what I do.'

'But you *must* care, dear Laurence, for my sake, because I love and trust you so! The very first thing is that I must leave you. No, don't look at me in that despairing manner, or you will make the task so much harder than it is. You know *that I must go*, and at once. Laurence, dearest, I shall leave you to-night.'

'Oh, not to-night. Stay one night more. Only till to-morrow, Margarita. Don't leave me alone with my misery so soon.'

'Hush! I must not stay. If I were to stay one night I might stay all my life. If you love me, Laurence, don't ask me that again.'

'Go on. What is the next thing?'

'The next thing is, that you will fetch poor Daisy home, and try to love her and console her for all she has gone through these bitter years.'

'And you can counsel me to this?'

She drew a long breath before she answered him.

'Only because I know it to be right. Think of her, Laurence—as she was. Think of your pretty, loving, warm-hearted Daisy, dancing about the house with her baby in her arms—making the sunshine of every place she entered; and then think of her as she is now—melancholy, wandering, and wasted,—and your kind heart will overflow with tenderness towards her.'

'Poor unhappy child.'

'I knew you would feel so. Think how she loved you, Laurence. Think how you loved her —*better than ever you loved me*,' she added, in a quivering voice.

'*Never!*' he exclaimed, with so much vehemence as to startle her. 'Never! so help me Heaven! When you married me, Margarita, when you consented to come to my desolate home and bring such happiness with you as had never

been seen there before, I told you in my ignorance I could never love again as I had loved her. I believed what I said. My sore heart was but half healed, and I thought that it could never rejoice nor suffer again as it had done. And you —dear humble soul—you consented to take me even on such terms as those, and came, an angel and a blessing to my heart, such as no man ever had before. Margarita, I did not know what love was till I learned to love you. I looked on Daisy as a sweet, affectionate child, to be caressed and petted and protected, and I idealized her womanly qualities till I had raised them to the standard of excellence in my own mind. I loved her—God knows I loved her—but it was as the mother loves the child. I love *you,* as one aspiring soul loves another, ready and able to help it on its upward path. In your gentleness, your innocence, your clinging tenderness, I have protected you, but in faith and virtue and perseverance you have protected me, Margarita, as no other woman

could have done. Oh! my wife—my *only* wife! I do not love and cherish you only—I thank you—I bless you—I adore you for the salvation you have been to my wayward and misguided heart.'

'Thank you, Laurence,' she said simply, as he pressed his kisses on her unresisting hands and face. 'Your words have given me fresh life—life to carry with me where I go——'

'Where? Where are you going? How can I let you live alone?'

'I shall not live alone—I would not do it for your sake. We will go to Maple Farm, little Daisy and I, and there you will think of me protected and at peace, amongst my old haunts—pursuing my old occupations.'

'With the brand of shame upon you,' he said bitterly.

'Not so, Laurence. They all know me there. Pity may follow me, but not shame. And I shall be of use, too. Uncle will be glad to have me

back, and when they know the truth they will feel that you are doing what is honourable and right. And that shall be my consolation,' she added softly.

'And what am I to do with her?' he asked.

'Call her Daisy, Laurence—try to think of her by the old name. I think, if you will take my advice, you will send for Dr Bellew and tell him the whole story. Then he will provide proper attendants for our poor stricken darling, and you can have her home here. Oh! do have her home, Laurence. Don't send her to an asylum. Think how long it is since she has heard a word of affection, or felt a caress. Poor sweet Daisy. How strange and cold the world she lives in now must appear, after the world of love she left. Promise me, Laurence, that you will at least try how it succeeds, that you will have her home.'

'To fill YOUR place!' he said with a harsh laugh.

'No, love!—not to fill my place—to take her own. I am the usurper, Laurence; she the rightful heir.'

'You will never persuade me of that,' he answered. 'It is too hard, too cruel, that this should have happened now. For months I prayed to have her restored to me, in vain; and now that I have built up another home for myself, she reappears to pull it to the ground. Is this the work of a loving Father? Yet you tell me God watches over our interests as though they were His own.'

'Hush, dearest! Even this is sent in mercy, though we cannot see it. Perhaps we have loved each other too well, and it is necessary that we should part in order to perceive it. It cannot be for long, love, remember that. No hearts that truly love can ever truly be separated. This life, thank God, does not last for ever.'

'You are quite determined to go to-day,' he said presently.

'Quite.'

'Which of the servants will you take with you?'

'None, Laurence.'

'Nonsense! I will not hear of your going alone, without the nurse or your own maid. It is impossible. I should be wretched.'

She laid her hand upon his shoulder.

'Oh, dearest! Do try to understand. Don't keep on tearing open my wounds in this manner. I am Margarita Hay, your wife's cousin. I have no claim upon the services of your servants; nor would I accept them. Do you think I can keep a nurse or a lady's maid down at Maple Farm?'

'Of course you can if you choose. I shall make you an allowance.'

'No, no,' she said quickly, as if his words had stung her. 'You shall not. I will not take it.'

'Margarita,' he said reproachfully, 'is so small a relief to be denied me?'

'Forgive me, dear love; but I could not—indeed I could not. You don't know what I feel upon the subject.'

'I can guess. And I know what I feel. That my beloved and honoured wife will be less kind and generous than I take her to be if, from false shame, she prevents my doing a simple act of justice.'

'It is not mine,' said Margarita.

'But it is mine, and I am yours, and yours only till my death,' he answered. 'Hear me swear it, Margarita.'

'No, no!' she exclaimed, as she caught his uplifted arm. 'You must not; you shall not. It is an insult to her, whose alone you are, and to God, who gave you to her. Rather, Laurence,' she went on earnestly, 'let us kneel down together, and thank Him for the many years' happiness He has permitted us to enjoy, and now that He recalls it, give it back unmurmuringly, like dutiful, obedient children, to His hands, and He

will keep it for us safely till the time comes for its restoration. Oh, Laurence, kneel and pray with me. We have shared every thought, and pain, and pleasure for many years past. Let not this last hour, however sorrowful, be less united.'

She forced him to her side, and with her arms thrown round his neck, addressed their Maker in such words of child-like submission and confidence, as he had never heard before. That prayer haunted him to his dying day. It took every argument with which he had intended to re-assail her out of his mouth. As it was concluded he rose to his feet, prepared to let her do exactly as she chose.

'And now,' said Margarita, with a great effort to speak in her usual voice, 'the sooner it is done the better. My things are already packed, Laurence, and there is nothing left to do but to put Daisy and me into a cab. I shall tell the servants I am going down to Maple Farm on a visit, and

when I am gone——' Here she paused, poor child, and swallowed some unaccountable obstruction in her throat. 'When I am fairly off—to-morrow or next day—you had better tell them the truth and give them the option of remaining. The nurse and Ellen of course you will dismiss. They will be of no use to you.'

'I wish you would take the nurse,' he reiterated.

'No, thank you. The child will not require the attendance in the country she does here. And, after that, I shall hear from you, Laurence. You will write and tell me everything, and let my uncle know all about Daisy. What a shock it will be to the dear old man! Almost as great as the first.'

'Can you get to Taunton to-night?'

'Yes! by the six o'clock train, and we will sleep at the hotel there and go on to Bushthorne in the morning.'

'And you have money?'

'Plenty.'

'How much?'

'Twenty-five pounds.'

'You had better take some more, Margarita.'

'No, thank you. This is more than enough.'

'Well! I can easily send it to you.'

'We will discuss that afterwards. And now, Laurence, I am going to ask you to leave the house.'

'Before you go——'

'Yes, at once. This parting is like some terrible operation. *It must be done,* but I can bear it better by myself. You would not like me to break down before the servants.'

'You are right, as you always are. Where shall I go?'

'Go to Dr Bellew's. Tell him about your wife.'

'I will, since you wish it. But, oh, Margarita! this is worse than death.'

'It is,' she answered, solemnly. 'But beyond

death is heaven, Laurence, and behind this is *God.*'

They did not exchange another word. He took her in his arms as though she had been some sacred thing. Looked in her sad face long and earnestly, pressed his lips to hers, and left the apartment.

She stood for a moment motionless, then sunk on her knees beside his familiar chair and buried her head in its cushions. When she rose up again it was to rush hastily up-stairs, as though she feared to trust herself a moment longer amidst the scenes where she had been so happy; and when, an hour later, Laurence Fane, half hoping he might be too soon, returned, it was to find his household gods scattered, and the hearth desolate and cold.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIGHTFUL MISTRESS.

ILL news travels apace. Our joys we may keep to ourselves for a little while, but our sorrows and our scandals are generally common property almost as soon as they are ours. Laurence Fane being of a sensitive turn of mind, had dreaded above all things having to break the news of the sudden change in his household, and its cause, to his servants, but as the hours went on he found that it was quite unnecessary he should do so. How they had arrived at the intelligence no one could guess, but they seemed to know all about it. The low tones in which they spoke to him—the deference they showed to his least wish, no less than the utter silence which they main-

tained on the subject of their mistress's departure, all told him how well they were aware of his trouble, and how they sympathized with it. The news did not confine itself to their circle. With the morning's post came a long kind letter from Miss Folkes, begging to know, for Margarita's sake, if she could be of any use to him in his dilemma, and before his neglected breakfast had been cleared away Jack Reeves was by his side, putting the matter in its best possible light, and cheering him up as much as the unfortunate circumstances would admit of. But neither of these friends could conscientiously recommend the only course of action on which his heart was bent, that he should place poor Daisy under the best care, and leave England with the woman whom he called his wife.

Sympathetic as was Miss Folkes, and careless as was Jack Reeves, they dared not counsel him to try and purchase temporal peace at the expense of spiritual, and he turned from their condolences

with a sick heart. After breakfast, arrived Dr Bellew. He had been put in possession of all the facts of the case the day before, and had just come from visiting and examining poor Daisy. His report was not consolatory. As far as he could judge, he thought the case a very hopeless one, and strongly advised Laurence Fane to remove her to a private asylum.

'You can do her no possible good, and it will only distress and unsettle you to keep her under your own eyes. Why not commit her to the care of my friend Dr Binton, who keeps a first-rate establishment, where the poor lady will have every indulgence and luxury, and be made as happy as her condition will allow.'

'No, doctor! I can't do that. I don't like the idea of it in the first place, and in the second, I promised my wife that I would have her home here. She was very strongly attached to her, remember!'

'Here!' exclaimed the doctor in astonish-

ment. 'You promised Mrs Fane to have her home here? Have you thought of the talk, the conjectures, the scandal such a proceeding may give rise to? Will you be able to stand it?'

'I think so; at all events I shall try. For, after all, where could I go now and not be talked of? It would be the same all over England or Europe, and I fancy it will be less hard amongst one's friends than from strangers. For it is more my misfortune than my fault,' he added humbly.

'Mr Fane, you are a brave man and a good man,' said Dr Bellew.

'I am a very miserable man at present, doctor. If it were only myself, I could bear it and rejoice at it—but the thought of *her* cuts me to the heart.'

'Try and comfort yourself with the assurance that you are doing your duty. Think of that, Mr Fane.'

'My only comfort is in trying not to think at all. But go and look at the rooms, doctor, and

tell me if they will suit. I propose to put her in what were the nurseries. I suppose she ought to have two assistants. I wish her to have every comfort.'

'Yes, yes. We'll see to that. I have an excellent nurse ready to come to you at a moment's notice, and she, with the help of a housemaid, will be quite sufficient. You are determined to have your—this lady—home here then?'

'Call her "Mrs Fane." I must learn to bear it. I must learn to believe that it is true.'

'You quite wish me to give orders for the removal of Mrs Fane from the asylum to this house?'

'Yes.'

'When?'

'The sooner the better. What can it signify?'

'The nurse shall bring her to you then to-night.'

'Very good. Only do me one favour, Bellew. Tell the servants of the impending change, and

prepare them for her arrival. They will require a few orders for the preparation of the rooms.'

'I will take all that trouble off your hands, Fane. Don't think about it again. And now can't you go out and shake yourself up a little? Dine with your friends at the Club, and go to some place of amusement afterwards. I can't have you mope like this, or I shall have two patients on my hands instead of one.'

'*Amusement!*' echoed Fane bitterly, as he took up his hat and left the house.

He did not return till late, and then he shut himself up in his library and locked the door. No one came to disturb him. At about half-past five, when darkness had fallen over the city like a veil, he heard the sound of carriage wheels that stopped before the door, and then a whispering and a rustling in the passage, mingled with the tones of Dr Bellew's voice. Footsteps ascended the staircase, a childish voice was heard complaining of the cold or darkness or the strange

house; and then all was silence and quietude again. Fane sat before the fire, stopping his ears with his fingers and wishing he had not come home till midnight; but no further disturbance reached his sanctuary. Even Dr Bellew left the house again without inquiring for him; and he was free to do as he chose.

It was over then. The change had been effected. The rightful mistress had resumed her place, and his Margarita—his darling—a mother and not a wife—must live in all the future an outcast from his home and heart.

As the thought flashed through his mind other memories seemed to photograph themselves there, loving names and deeds and words by which he had rendered the desolate young creature now upstairs so happy in the days gone by. The caressing appellation by which he had mentally spoken of Margarita and the harsh term he had applied to Daisy—*once* so much his darling too—rose up in judgment against him, and he began to ask his

own heart *what* she had done that he should regard her as an interloper there. Her worst fault, poor child, had been *to live*. And how in the first hours of his bereavement he would have hailed her living! Was SHE to blame because his fickle nature had filled her vacant place so soon with one better fitted to guide and sustain it than herself? As he gave the rein to memory and let it wander back into the past, all the love he used to bear her came rushing back upon his mind. His blooming wife—his sweet dimpled Daisy—the rose-bud girl who loved him so entirely and so well, and parted from him with so much despair. Was it possible she had come back, and he was worse than indifferent to her return? He thought of her as she had been from the first girlish smile that had bewitched him, to the last look of love she cast upwards in his face; the last cry that had reached him above the noise of the crackling fire and the shouts of the bewildered crowd. 'Oh, Laury, come with me!' He thought of her

startled, tearful eyes—like wood violets laden with dew—of the dimpled neck and shoulders over which he had drawn the blanket—of the unconscious pink-faced infant slumbering on her innocent, child-like breast — until all the great affection he had borne his first wife seemed to come rushing back upon his heart like a flood, and he was ready to leap from his seat and rush up-stairs, and clasp her in his arms and call to her absent mind to come back and know him for her own, and love him as she used to do in the happy days when they were one. But here the thought of Margarita interposed to make the wretched man sink backwards with a groan. Margarita, who had come to him in the midst of his great despair, and nursed him back to mental life again, and been his good angel, and his loving, devoted servant ever since—who was the mother of his living child—to whom he had sworn the most unalterable fealty. How could he tell Daisy that he loved her still, whilst half his heart was down

at Maple Farm? How could he encourage her affection in return without being faithless to her cousin? He could not help feeling his bosom stirred with love and pity for the poor wreck that he had called his wife—but he could not deny that he clung to Margarita as the dying cling to hope, and that he would have given all he possessed to see her once more 'reseated in her place of light.' Yet how could he be so unmindful—so inconstant—so ungrateful as to wish the poor child who had suffered so long and so bitterly, to be anywhere but where she was? Would he have her lying senseless beneath the cruel waters, or the life-long inmate of a pauper lunatic asylum? What would he have? What did he wish? If he could only choose the right and feel that it was the right, and cleave to it. But he had lost the power of choice. He felt as though these conflicting opinions were unsexing him.

Carson came by-and-by and knocked gently at his door, and asked if he would take his dinner

at home. He drew the old man into the library and spoke to him as though he had been a friend.

'Don't let me be worried about this, Carson. I shall never dine at home again—only you will see that *she* and her attendants have everything that they can possibly require. You will spare no expense in providing for them—or trouble.'

'Certainly not, sir.'

'And you will dismiss Ellen and the nurse for me? Give them three months' wages—they have been good servants, but don't let me see them again.'

'Very good, sir.'

'Give me my coat and hat. I am going out now, and may not be back to-night. Don't let the servants sit up for me. And tell them, Carson, I can't expect them, of course, to keep their mouths shut, but, for the sake of their old mistress, whom I know they loved, I wish they would make as little of all this as they need.'

'I'll dismiss the first one as I catch chattering,

sir. But if I may make so bold as to say it, I hope you will look after your own health, and not fret too much for what can't be helped.'

'Thank you, Carson. Yes; I'll take care, never fear, for others' sakes, if not for my own.

He tried to divert his mind that evening by following Dr Bellew's advice; but it was a sad failure, and about two o'clock in the morning he returned to his desolated home. As he went cautiously up-stairs, he encountered on the upper landing a gaunt female, whom he had never seen before. At first he was about to inquire her business: then he remembered she must be the nurse.

'I did not expect to find any one up,' he said, hurriedly. 'I hope there is nothing the matter.'

'Bless, you, sir, I have only been getting the poor dear a drink. She's been sleeping beautiful all night, just like a hinfant, and so, for the matter of that, she is still. Just come in and have a look at her, sir. It'll do you good.'

He followed her into the apartment which had been his child's night nursery, and to the white-curtained bed where he had so often stolen on tiptoe to steal a last kiss from little Daisy. There, stretched out upon her pillows, slumbering as peacefully and looking almost as innocent, lay her namesake, the object of his first adoration. He bent over her. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips parted. She looked more like the wife, from whom he had been so cruelly separated, than he had seen her do before. He took a seat beside the bed and sat down. He laid his head beside hers on the pillow—the tears rushed thickly into his eyes.

'My poor love,' he whispered tenderly. 'My faded blossom.'

The nurse had slipped quietly from the apartment. He was alone with his wife. He took her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers, but she slept on, heavily. He looked at her wasted limbs and face, the lines of silver in her thin brown

hair, the wedding ring that still encircled the third finger of her left hand, and felt all the emotion which had stirred him in the library returning in full force.

'My wife,' he exclaimed pathetically, 'my poor, afflicted wife.'

But here she stirred uneasily and sighed. Perhaps,—who knows?—the familiar voice which conveyed no recollection in her waking moments may have had power to revive old memories in her sleeping brain. Anyway she turned her face full towards him, and said in a low voice, 'Rita.'

The name stung him like a serpent's tooth.

'Rita!' Rita, the beloved, the faithful, the sorrowing, sleeping perhaps upon a tear-stained pillow, whilst he was holding another woman in his arms and calling her his 'wife, his poor afflicted wife!'

It was a lie. He had no wife but one, and she, dear angel, was at Maple Farm.

As her cousin's name left Daisy's lips, Lau-

rence Fane replaced her hastily upon the pillow and turned to leave the room.

But when he had got half way to the door, he stopped and looked back.

'My God! what has she done?' he murmured. So he returned to the bedside and kissed her poor unconscious forehead—then rushed to his own apartment. His uncertain actions were but pictures of his troubled mind.

CHAPTER III.

THE OTHER HALF.

LAURENCE FANE did not see his wife again for several days. Late events had so upset him that Jack Reeves persuaded him to make a trip into the country somewhere, with the hope of diverting his mind a little, but his good intentions were not crowned with success. Laurence's thoughts were too much distracted to enable him to benefit by the change, and after a few restless days he made a pretence of business and returned to his town house. How forcibly it struck him with a sense of emptiness and desolation! At former home-comings Margarita had always been ready to receive him, and his child to leap into his arms with shouts of welcome; now Carson let him in

silently and deferentially, and he walked into his unused library and regarded the prim order with which everything was set with a feeling as though death were in the house.

'All going on well, Carson?'

'Perfectly well, sir.'

'Any letters for me?'

They were brought to him from an adjoining table. Then the servant was about to leave the room.

'Ah, well! Look here, Carson. Can I dine here to-night?'

'Of course, sir. At the usual time, I suppose, sir. What will you please to have?'

'Oh, anything the cook thinks of. It is immaterial to me. And, do you happen to have seen much of the nurse since I have been away, Carson?'

'Not much, sir. She takes her meals with—with——.'

'With Mrs Fane in the day nursery,' said the

master, boldly. 'Yes, so I concluded. Does she appear an able sort of person?'

'Very much so I should say, sir; and she seems quiet and steady.'

'That's the main thing. I think I should like to speak to her by-and-by. What's her name?'

'Mrs Honeywood, sir.'

'Well, tell her to come down to me.'

'Very good, sir,' and Carson withdrew to give the order.

He felt so lonely—so completely by himself. Even the prospect of speaking to the nurse pleased him. In a few minutes she tapped at the door.

'Come in,' cried Fane.

She was a tall gaunt woman, with hard hands and features, but she had a kindly face, and looked in every way fitted for the office she had assumed.

'I want to speak to you about your patient, nurse,' he commenced. 'How is she? Quite well and tractable?'

'Oh! she's as tractable as a lamb, sir, and

don't give no manner of trouble, but she's got a nasty cough, and I made bold to speak to the doctor about it yesterday.'

'And what did he say?'

'He said 'twas weakness on the chest, sir, and gave me some medicine for her. I've taken her out in the carriage every day, according to your orders, and she was quite pleased with the sight of the park and the people, and lively after it.'

'Can she understand what you say to her?'

'Bless you, yes, sir, every word, and talks quite sensibly sometimes. It isn't for me to suggest anything, sir, of course, but what's according to your own wishes, but I do think if you would have her down into the drawing-room now and then for a bit, it would do her a deal of good.'

'Do you really think she would care to come?'

'I wish you'd try it, sir. She might come to know you in time, there's no saying, and I'm sure she's got the most lovingest of hearts, poor dear, as ever I see.'

'You have everything you want, I hope?' he said hurriedly. 'The dinners are served as they should be?'

'Dear me, yes, sir. Everything is most beautiful; but Mrs Fane don't eat as I'd like to see her. I'm sure yesterday we'd as fine a chicken as was ever put on table, and I quite hoped she'd take a fancy to it; but she didn't pick enough for a canary bird.'

'Her health is not good, then?'

'Well! she's not strong, sir; and she's so low in her spirits sometimes, it makes me quite sad to watch her. If I may make so bold as to ask, did she ever bear a child, sir?'

'Yes! Yes!'

'And lost it maybe?'

'Yes—it was lost!'

'Poor dear lady! I thought as much. It's always a running in her thoughts; and she gets hold of every old rag she can, and makes them up into a bundle, and there she sits nursing it

and talking to it. It's quite touching to see her. I wish there was a child about the house. She'd take to it wonderful, I'm sure.'

But at this inopportune allusion her master cut her short.

'Well, you can bring Mrs Fane down into the drawing-room to-night, if you think it will give her any pleasure. I shall be there after eight o'clock. That will do, Mrs Honeywood; you can go.'

He tried to apply himself after this to the business of correspondence, but he felt too unsettled to do real work. So he lounged in his study chair till dinner time, professing to read, but in reality indulging in bitter recollection. Yet he was glad when the gong sounded for his meal, still more so when it was concluded, and he could adjourn to the drawing-room. He was impatient to see Daisy again, although he would not acknowledge it. At half-past eight Mrs Honeywood knocked at the door.

'Mrs Fane is quite ready, sir! Shall I bring her down?'

'Yes!'

The woman did not immediately retire, but walked across the room, and pushed the mantel-piece ornaments further from the edge.

'What are you doing there?'

'Only making the things safer, sir. You mustn't forget that she's a bit flighty, and might take a fancy for pulling them over.'

'I don't forget,' he answered, with a sigh.

'You mustn't take on, sir,' said the nurse kindly, 'she's as meek as a lamb to-night, and quite pleased to think she's coming down-stairs. She shall be here in a minute.'

When he heard her coming, he tried to brace himself up. The poor child must not see him melancholy, he thought, or she would become more so. So he rose from his seat and stood against the mantel-piece, ready to greet her with a smile. She entered the room, clinging to the

nurse's arm. Miss Folkes and Mrs Honeywood having been given *carte-blanche* to get all that was necessary, had procured some loose white dressing-gowns for Daisy, and the one she now wore was ornamented with bows of blue ribbon, and suited her wasted figure and pale face admirably. Her short hair was tied back from her forehead like that of a child, and her whole appearance, though careworn, was still very youthful.

As she appeared, Laurence Fane started forward to receive her, but she shrunk from him visibly. 'Don't let the man touch me,' she said to her nurse in a voice of fear.

'Don't you know me, Daisy?' exclaimed Laurence, sorrowfully. 'I am Laury, your husband. Won't you speak to me?'

'Come! speak to the gentleman!' said the nurse encouragingly, as if she were persuading an infant to make friends.

Do I know him?' whispered Daisy.

'Of course you do. This is Mr Fane! your

own good gentleman. Come! give him your hand and say good evening.'

But this was more than Laurence's tortured heart could bear.

'Can't you leave us alone?' he said to the nurse. 'Won't she stay with me?'

'I dare say she will, sir! but she's very timid. Is there nothing you could show her that would take her attention?'

With an inward groan he went and found one of his absent child's picture books, and opened it in front of her.

'Oh, how pretty!' she exclaimed directly, and advanced towards him.

'Come and look at it with me,' he said softly.

She took the book from his hands and sat down on the sofa, and commenced to turn over the leaves.

The nurse seized the opportunity to quit the room.

They were alone together once more!

Fane gazed at her wasted little hands, playing with the picture book, her large wild eyes and her grey-streaked hair, till his heart seemed bursting with the desire to comfort her.

'Daisy,' he said hungrily, 'Daisy, my own darling girl, don't you know me?'

She looked up quickly. She perceived they were alone. An expression of fear passed over her countenance.

'Don't be frightened, my sweet,' he continued, tenderly. 'I would not hurt you, Daisy. I am Laury!'

Something in the sound seemed to strike her.

'Once I was in heaven,' she said, mysteriously, 'and I heard that name. I think it was an angel's. But he never came back. He never came back!'

'*Who* never came back, dear? *I* am here, Daisy.'

'Little daisies grow in the grass, and their eyes see God. Have you ever been in the water?'

she continued, turning her large blue orbs full upon his face.

'No, dear love!' he said, excitedly, thinking she was about to recognize him. 'Have you?'

'Oh yes, often! It's very cold, but I don't mind, because I go to look for my baby. He's asleep there.'

'He's dead, dear Daisy. He's gone to heaven.'

'Who's dead—my baby?' she said, smiling. 'Why, he's up in the nursery with the woman. I left him in my bed. We always sleep together because the water is so cold, and since *he* went away there's only half of me.'

'Who went away? Tell me all about it.' He had got possession of her hand now, and she let him press and stroke it without opposition.

'The other half! He was a much bigger half than I—much taller, and wiser, and better. I have only lived a little since he went. That is not strange, is it? For how can a woman live properly when half of her is dead? But he will come

back, perhaps, some day. I know that, because baby says so.'

'He has come back, my poor child. I am he. We have been cruelly separated, my Daisy, but now that we have met again, we will live and die with one another. Look at me—I am that other bigger half that you thought was lost for ever.'

Daisy listened to this harangue with astonishment, then broke out into a childish laugh.

'Silly man!' she said, tittering, 'silly, silly man. You have no wings; and he has flown away, far, far up! If it were not so far he would hear me call him, but he cannot. If he heard me he would reply. Sometimes,' she went on in a mournful tone, 'I listen, and listen, and listen for hours, but there is no sound, only the waters rushing under my bed.'

'Do the waters frighten you, dear Daisy?'

'Not now, because the baby lives in them; but they used to, long ago. The water is under me and the air is above me, and I am between

them, else how could I live, you know, because I am only a half——'

'Tell me how your other half left you?'

'He flew away, the baby says so. He was strong and had wings, and I called him to come back, but he flew above me, so he is in the air. And the baby sleeps in the water. And I am between.'

'Daisy, Daisy, don't talk like this. I am your Laury whom you used to love so much. Come back to me, darling, and be my wife as you were before,' exclaimed Fane in a voice choked by emotion.

But she escaped from his hold, and, seizing upon a sofa cushion, commenced to rock it backwards and forwards as he had seen her do in the asylum.

'Hush!' she said, with an uplifted finger, 'don't wake the baby. He might fly away too, you know, and then there would be nothing under me.' He looked at her in dull despair. It was

something too awful to find himself alone with the empty shell of the creature he had loved so entirely, and to look in vain for the soul which had animated it. One moment he felt as though he must rush forward and clasp her in his arms, the next he shrunk away to the furthest corner of the sofa with a look almost of aversion.

It was an intense relief to him when Mrs Honeywood knocked at the door to take her patient up-stairs again, and the eagerness with which Daisy prepared to accompany her nurse proved that she was happy with her, and took a load off his mind with respect to her missing those she had left behind. Before she quitted the room, he approached her side, and kissed her on the cheeks and forehead.

'God bless you, my poor love,' he said, solemnly; 'and in His own good time restore you to me and to yourself.'

'The man likes me,' remarked Daisy, with an

affected giggle, to her nurse, as they left the apartment together.

Fane sunk back upon the sofa with a groan; was ever sight so pitiable, so miserable, as this? Could he live with it continually beneath his eyes?

Should he not go mad, too, with regret and disappointment, and the gnawing pain which had already begun to make itself felt for Margarita?

Margarita and his child! Was he never to see them in that house again? Was his whole future life to be spent in useless lamentation and tears? Just God in heaven! take him from a world which had become so utterly desolate and lone to him!

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THEY FARED AT BUSHTHORNE.

THE sudden arrival of Margarita and her child had been a terrible shock at Bushthorne; a shock which was not to be mitigated even by the announcement of poor Daisy's miraculous recovery. Especially was it felt by her cousin George West, who seemed to imagine (till she persuaded him to the contrary) that Laurence Fane deserved in some measure to be called to account for her position. Neither he nor his father could realize that their Rita, the pride of their household, in whose prosperity they had unanimously rejoiced, had been returned on their hands, in the eyes of the world a dishonoured woman!

The fact of Daisy's re-appearance staggered them, but could not blunt their sensibilities. Her loss was a by-gone sorrow. They had wept over it till they could weep no longer, and settled down into passive submission to the will of the Almighty. And now that she had come back again—although they dared not say that they were sorry, they could not say that they rejoiced. Their first astonishment at the news over, they had only pity left for the poor mad girl. All their affection and lamentations they poured out over Margarita. In the cruelty of her lot they passed over that of Daisy and Laurence Fane. They thought of them as re-united; of Margarita, as deserted; and in her anxiety lest they should think that her husband had lost all his love for his first wife, she would not tell them how bitterly he had suffered before he had separated from her. She enlisted their sympathies as much as possible on Daisy's side, spoke of her pitiable condition and wasted health, of all that she had suffered and

lost, till she wept aloud over her own description, yet her hearers' eyes were dry.

'You will go and see them, dear uncle! will you not?' she pleaded in conclusion. 'You will not leave poor Laurence alone in this fearful extremity, but let him see how much her family sympathize with him?'

'I don't know about that, Rita!' replied the old man. 'Perhaps I may after a bit, but I don't feel like it now. It has all been too sudden and too terrible. When I thought my poor girl was safe in heaven I could be content, but to find that she's been knocking about amongst all these mad people, and turned up now, just to deprive you of your rights, and to make your child a——'

'Don't say that, uncle! Please don't say that word. It is not true! The world may call me and my poor child hard names, but Laurence has taught me, so long as I do right, not to care for the world. And I know,' she continued, with

glowing eyes, 'that in the sight of God we *were* married, and our child honourably born, and that this terrible mistake (for which we are neither of us accountable) has come upon us by His will. And therefore I am not ashamed—nor would I have these few happy years erased even from my memory, though I suppose I must try—I suppose it is right that I should try—to—to—be glad that they are ended.'

'And what do you mean to do here, Rita? How shall you employ yourself?'

'Just as I used to do, dear uncle, if Carrie will allow me. I want to be of use to you in the farm accounts, and about the dairy and the house. I shall be no expense now, for I can support myself and my child by writing. But should there be any question about my remaining here I will take apartments in Taunton, though I should like to live at Maple Farm. I can better fancy myself a girl again in the old place, and perhaps—in time —I may come to look upon the past as on some

blessed dream that gives no pain. Only it must be as Carrie wishes. I do not forget that she is mistress here.'

'I should like to hear Carrie make any objection,' said George, determinedly.

Carrie was not at all disposed to object—at first. Life at Maple Farm was rather dull than otherwise, and Margarita's arrival was a little change. Added to which the George Wests had increased and multiplied to an alarming extent during the last few years, and the mother found her hands full enough without having the household affairs to look after. So she welcomed her husband's cousin eagerly, and assured her she would only be too thankful could she relieve her of the business of housekeeping; and had it not been for the expressions of pity for her condition with which Carrie's conversation was plentifully interlarded, Margarita would almost have felt glad that, since her own brief career of brightness was ended, she had been mercifully transferred to a

position, where, if she could not be happy, she could at least prove of use.

She would allow herself no time either for reflection or despondency, but at once took up an active part in the business of the household. The dairy was again placed under her supervision, and she organized a class composed of Daisy and her little cousins, and taught them for an hour a day. Then she would make up the old farmer's weekly accounts, or take the children for a walk, or do any other office, however drudging, which fell within her sphere of action. George West and his father remonstrated with her upon doing so much. Even Carrie, who had grown fat and lazy since her marriage, declared that Margarita would 'wear herself out.' Still she went on working unceasingly, and the only signs of impatience she showed were when any of her friends attempted to prevent her. Could they have known how much more she did than ever met their eyes, they would have become not only remonstrative but

alarmed. Could they have seen the unhappy woman, when, having retired to rest, as they thought, with her little child, she abandoned herself to grief, which, without some such outlet, would have driven her mad, they would have been still more astonished at the control she exercised by day. Left alone with the sleeping child of him whom she loved better than her life, but of whom even to think as she had thought, had changed from a glory to a crime, Margarita would give full vent to the feelings that possessed her—not by groans, or tears, or hysterical laughter, but by impassioned words, and scenes, and actions that blistered the paper upon which she wrote; that dipped her pen in the very well of truth, and made her fictitious characters move and speak with glorious reality. There is no such writing as that which is transcribed from the depths of a regretful memory; no such bitter sentences imagined as those which ring back mockingly from the still quivering tablets of our wounded

hearts. Margarita had no injustice to complain of—no infidelity to resent—but her heroes and heroines became broken-spirited as she was, and she wrote of grief and disappointment so easily as to astonish herself. Often the sheets of paper, destined to be handled by the publisher's clerks and the compositors, were blotted by her sacred tears, and the woes of her imaginary characters touched the chords in her own breast so nearly, that she wept for them as though she were not just as miserable herself. Still, helped by prayer and the knowledge that she was doing right, Margarita struggled bravely on, though each moment of the day and night, on whatever work she might be employed, was consecrated to the memory of her absent love.

She had written to Laurence several times, and he had answered her letters, but their correspondence, which had commenced by being such an alleviation to her pain, had ended by increasing it. Laurence could not be brought to view their

separation in the same light that she did. All *her* letters were filled with entreaties that he would reconcile himself to the will of the Almighty, and find comfort in the consciousness that he was obeying it. All *his* with bitter lamentations over the misfortune that had befallen them, and wild longings to meet her again. And what Margarita most dreaded was that he would follow her to Bushthorne. Because she so earnestly desired to see him, because she lay awake at night peering into the darkness with some vague hope of catching a reflex of the dear familiar features; because, with bated breath, she halted at every fresh noise that sounded in the house, thinking it might be his voice, because she felt sometimes that she must die if he did *not* come, for all these reasons the heroic woman knew that they should keep apart. And knowing it, with the strength of an inspired martyr she concealed her own feelings on the subject, and answered the despairing letters she received every day with the most

solemn injunctions for her lover's conduct, and entreaties that he would not disturb the peace she was striving to acquire, by his restlessness.

But one thing the inhabitants of Maple Farm (Rita included) seemed unable to manage, and that was to speak of poor Daisy as they had been used to do. The one who was most injured by her unexpected reappearance had tried to re-establish the familiar mention of her name, but it had been a failure. The old farmer could not bear the subject mentioned, and George invariably changed it for another. This omission chafed Margarita's spirit. It struck her with a keen sense of injustice, and she felt as though her submission to the will of Heaven would not be perfected until she had persuaded her uncle and cousin not only to acknowledge but rejoice over the preservation of the daughter and sister they had once so much cherished. Had it not been for this knowledge, that she was fighting in the cause of right, added

to the old love for Daisy, which, in spite of all that had passed, clung to her as part of herself, Margarita, under the double pressure of work and grief, must have broken down. Yet she went on, from day to day, almost cheerfully. The only difference apparent being that her love for her child, which had always been subservient to that for Laurence, grew almost into idolatry. She could not bear Daisy out of her sight; whatever her occupation, the fair-haired little girl was clinging to her dress, and often and often during the weary, spun-out days, when nobody was looking, would she seize her up and passionately kiss and cry over her until she had frightened the child into weeping also. And then the occasional demands from Daisy for her father, to whom she was deeply attached, were as so many swords thrust into her poor mother's heart. She tried to explain to the child that they were no longer to live with her dear papa, and that it was impossible he could come to them, but Daisy was not to

be so deluded. She knew that her papa would come some day: that he would travel in the 'puff puff,' the same as she and mamma had done; and that he would bring her nursey with him, and the little dog that she always called her own. Margarita tried to stop the little tongue in vain. Daisy was confident she knew best; and each morning as she rose from her bed she would exclaim, 'I really do think my papa will come to-day.' It was now four weeks since they had left London. Laurence's letters grew more desponding by every post, but he had never positively said he should seek Margarita out again. She had been walking one afternoon with the tribe of little children, and returning home, with her eyes cast on the ground, and her whole soul absorbed in sorrowful reflection, let them precede her to the house and heard them clatter through the square old-fashioned hall as she sauntered up the garden path.

Presently there arose a shout of astonishment.

Then came the announcement, in a treble voice, from George's eldest boy, who rushed to the open door, 'Cousin Rita, there's a strange man in the parlour.' Something in the child's manner made her heart stand still. It was not of one of the ordinary visitors to the farm he spoke.

In another moment her fears were made certain. A glad excited cry of 'Papa' uprose from Daisy's lips, and Margarita knew that they were to meet again. When she staggered into the room that contained him, she looked like a corpse.

CHAPTER V.

TWIXT RIGHT AND MIGHT.

THERE sat Laurence Fane with his child in his arms and all the little Wests standing open-mouthed around him, straining his eyes towards the door through which she must enter.

She appeared, feeling her way as though she had been blind. They gazed at one another. How changed each appeared to each. Laurence looked worn and tempest-tossed, his cheeks were sunken and his eyes heavy, whilst Margarita might have been sleepless since the day they parted, so dark, and aged, and haggard seemed her face.

The contrast struck him as with a sudden blow.

'Send the children away,' were the first words he uttered, and then as, more by the motion of her hand than by any words that issued from her dry lips, she dismissed the gaping little crowd (though Daisy fought hard at being put out of the room), he sprung at her like a tiger springing on its prey.

'My love, my own!' he panted. 'Now I hold you in my arms once more.'

She could not answer him. Wild thoughts, wild emotions, were surging up in her brain and threatening to overthrow her good resolutions. She was all a woman and all a wife, and nature was crying out to her to give way and indulge the feelings with which her heart was bursting. The look in his eyes—the pressure of his arms—the accents of his voice—appeared to her as they had never done before. She thirsted for his kisses, she longed for the refuge of his bosom, yet she remained upright, trembling and silent. She would have given her life to be able to meet

him as she had been used to do, but there was a more valuable possession to Margarita than life, combating against the lower feeling, and Laurence's passionate greeting did not meet with any palpable return.

'What is this?' he demanded presently. 'Are you not glad to see me?'

'Glad! Oh, Laurence! If I *might* be glad, *how* glad I should be!' she whispered despairingly.

'You *must* be glad. I cannot live without you, Margarita. I have come to tell you so.'

'You should not have come here at all, Laurence.'

'Do you know the life I have been leading since we parted?' he went on, without heeding her interruption. 'Do you know what it is to be shut up day after day with a person who cannot recognize you, or answer a single question; whilst you look in vain for the sympathy on

which you existed, and the love that made your being?'

'My poor Laurence,' she said compassionately.

'Ah! you may well say "poor Laurence!" Margarita. My existence is a hell to me. I would cast it away to-morrow if I could.'

'You mustn't say that, even for *her* sake. How is she, Laurence? How is my poor stricken darling?'

'She is as well as usual, and I believe as happy as she can be under the circumstances. I brought her home, Margarita, at your request, but if it continues I shall go mad myself with looking at her. If I could only tell you the strain it is upon my mind. At first I really thought she would come to recognise me, but that hope has died out now. She has taken a dislike to me the last few days. She calls me "the monster," and will not be induced to come downstairs whilst I am there. And if I attempt to

show her any affection she laughs in my face, or tries to scratch me. Rather a contrast to the time when I married her, eh, Margarita?'

She is weeping now, as much from his cold and reckless manner when speaking of poor Daisy, as for the miserable account he gives of her.

'So terrible a contrast that I can hardly bear to think of it, Laurence, and what must it not be for you to see and bear? But it is your duty. That is all the consolation I can give you. Think of it, and be strong.'

'Strong? whilst we are apart. No, Margarita. You were my strength, and you have taken it all away with you. Oh, my love! my love! how I have longed for this hour! How I have dreamed of, and prayed for it. Kiss me, darling! Put your dear arms about my neck, and my head upon your bosom. I have been exiled from my home too long.'

'Oh, Laurence! do not ask me,' she ex-

claimed, shrinking from him. 'I cannot—I *dare* not do it. Dearest, be merciful! Think how I have had to struggle against myself, and do not turn all my newly-acquired strength into such utter weakness.'

'So this is for what I have come down here? Not much, certainly.'

'You should not have come down, dear Laurence! It is what I have been praying you might have the power given you to see is the very thing most to be avoided.'

'And what do you expect me to do then?' he demanded fiercely, 'live in that house the remainder of my life *alone:* never to see my child, yourself, or my father, or brother-in-law?'

'I don't know what to expect,' she said, sorrowfully, 'but I am sure there must be a straight path of duty open to us, and that we are bound to walk in it.'

'No one can keep a father from seeing his child,' said Laurence, in a sullen voice.

'No! No one can prevent that,' answered Margarita. 'She is your child—God bless her.'

'Our child, dearest. *Our* child whom God gave to us to make our happiness. Oh, Margarita, if you do not pity me, pity the child, and give her back a father.'

'I will give her back to you, if you desire it. I am ready to bear anything, all things, except that your noble nature should be dragged downwards by the frailty of mine.'

'How could you think I would deprive you of her. No! No! We will not have more misery than is absolutely necessary. If the child comes back to me, her mother must come with her.'

'I cannot come back,' she repeated, with a bitter cry. 'How can you ask me, Laurence? Would you have us live a life of open shame in order to wrong that poor unconscious girl I once loved better than myself?'

'Hush, hush, don't cry like that. The servants will all hear you. Where is your uncle?'

'Out at present, but he will be home before long. I want you to see him, Laurence. I want him to learn all the particulars of this sad business from your own lips. I have told him, of course, but neither he nor George have ever seemed to understand it properly.'

'What is it they cannot understand? That Daisy is out of her mind, or that she is alive?'

'Oh, no! They must believe that. They know it for a fact. Only with regard to myself they always seem to imagine somehow that things might have been prevented—as if—I—or you—had been in the wrong, Laurence, which we know of course to be unfounded.'

'They think, in fact, that I married again without sufficient proof of my first wife's death. Well, perhaps they are right. Only, what with

the official inquiry and private information, there seemed no doubt upon the matter. I wish to God there had been!'

'*I don't, Laurence.*'

He looked at her with astonishment.

'*You* don't? You who have lost more than all of us?'

'Do not mistake me, Laurence. Knowing now that our marriage was illegal, and our poor Daisy suffering all the while, I cannot but say that, humanly speaking, it would have been better had it never taken place, still I cannot say with truth that I regret it. Oh, how could I regret it,' she went on rapidly. 'My happy life, my bright, bright love, my child—and you, the best of all——'

But here remembering herself, she stopped short.

'I am wrong. Forgive me, Laurence. Instead of strengthening your resolutions, I am pulling down my own. I am a miserable coward.'

'You are a true-hearted loving woman, and you are making yourself and me utterly wretched for the sake of an overstrained sense of morality. Margarita, you know you consider that in the sight of God we are man and wife.'

'Oh, yes, I am sure of that. How could I live if I did not believe it.'

'And which do you fear most then, God or man? Whose approval should you be the more desirous to win? Dearest, why should we care what the world says? It scandalizes us in every phase of life. Let us think only of each other and be happy.'

'And what then is to become of Daisy?'

'Margarita, Daisy is no longer my wife. I cannot look on her as such. She must not even continue under the same roof with me. Her presence drives me to despair. And am I to live all the remainder of my wretched life alone? Is the tenderness on which you have taught me to rely never again to be mine? Oh, love, have pity

on me. Come back to your husband, my one only wife, and let the bitter world say of us what it will.'

'Laurence, you are tempting me like the Archfiend himself. I am not your wife; you are not my husband; and, so long as Daisy lives, we must forget that we have ever been so.'

'I shall speak to your uncle on the subject. He is a man. He will see this matter in a more sensible light than you do.'

'Oh, do not try to make my uncle persuade me to do what is wrong. He is an old man, Laurence, and his powers of judgment may be somewhat dulled. Do not bring more forces to bear upon me than they have done already.'

'Then he has reasoned with you on the subject. This fact decides me. I shall certainly try to enlist his sympathies on my side.'

She saw it would be useless to argue with him, so womanlike she temporized.

'May poor little Daisy come in now, Lau-

rence? She has cried after you almost every day.'

'Has she? My poor fatherless darling! Yes! Let her come in. She will not have many more opportunities perhaps of speaking to me.'

Margarita went to the door and called the child, and Daisy ran at once into her father's arms and nestled in his bosom.

'My poor lamb!' he said, pathetically, 'I thought to watch you growing up into a woman, but even *you* are not my own. I am an outcast and a pariah from both your hearts. The honest labourer who lies down to sleep beneath the same roof as his wife and child is a richer man than I.'

'Papa! Papa! don't cry.'

'Am I crying, baby? I am not always sure now if I cry or not. Well, grief is not to be weighed by tears, and he who has lost everything which he possessed has, at all events, no lower depths of misery to which to fall.'

He pretended to address the child, but Mar-

garita knew that his words were meant for her, and she trembled with emotion as she listened to them.

'Laurence, shall I go and see if uncle has returned?'

'Ay, you had better do so. It will not be long, I suppose, before I must be going.'

She flew to the little room known as her uncle's place of business, and there found the farmer and his son, looking about in the dusk for slippers for which to change their muddy boots. It was not so dark but that they could see her figure, but the expression of her face was undiscernible.

'Uncle—George—Laurence has come.'

'Laurence! and what should he be doing here?' exclaimed the farmer roughly.

'I should think he had better have waited until he was asked,' added his son, much in the same tone.

'Oh, don't be so hard upon him. What has

he done that you should speak of him in that way? Uncle, he wants to talk to you. I think —I am afraid—he wishes to persuade you to consent to my returning to him. But you will not do so, will you? You will not make this awful struggle more galling to me than it is!'

'Wants you to return to him!' repeated her cousin, quickly. 'What will the man ask next? Hasn't he done enough mischief already?'

'Uncle, I appeal to you. If you see Laurence you will be firm but kind. You know that it is impossible—that it must not be.'

'He shall persuade me to nothing that you do not wish yourself, my dear.'

'And you will not let George quarrel with him. Think what a friend he was once to you and George.'

'I can think of nothing but you, Rita, and your miserable position. However, I have no

wish to bandy words with Fane about it. I shall meet him as I have ever done.'

'That is all I ask,' she answered humbly, as she withdrew to summons him.

CHAPTER VI.

MARGARITA'S DECISION.

AS Laurence Fane was invited to an interview with his father and brother-in-law (who were also his uncle and cousin-in-law), he felt horribly guilty. He need not have done so, because his conscience was, in reality, void of offence; but it was a harassing position to be placed in. As he walked thoughtfully from the parlour to the office he could not help thinking of the time when he had first come down a visitor to Maple Farm, and been introduced to those two fresh, innocent girls, the pride and blessing of the little household, on whom the ill-fated shadow of his love had consecutively fallen like some untimely blight. Daisy's sweet cooing voice, and

Rita's whispered accents of affection, seemed to be ringing in his ears as he crossed the threshold of the farmer's sanctum, hardly knowing whether he ought to offer him his hand or not. Mr West solved the difficulty by coming forward to take the initiative.

'How do you do, Mr Fane?' he said coldly; and George's 'How are you, Fane?' with a nod of the head, was not a much warmer salutation.

'I am ill and miserable,' Laurence answered, without making any attempt to disguise his feelings, 'utterly miserable, Mr West, as you may believe, and so uncertain as to what is right or best to be done in the unfortunate dilemma in which I find myself, that I am anxious to hear your opinion on the subject and be guided by it.'

This frank confession disarmed them both. The old farmer sat down with a look of the deepest concern upon his countenance, and George

West went so far as to mutter that any way it wasn't Fane's fault, and no one could be such a fool as to think it.

'Thank you, George. No, it is not my fault, God knows; and yet I am the unhappy cause of two women's ruin. *You* know how fully I was persuaded of your sister's death. *You* know how long it was before I could be brought to believe that it was true, and how I suffered when I did believe it,' he added in a lower voice. 'You may suppose then *what it was* to me to discover she was still alive.'

'Had I remained unmarried,' he went on hurriedly, 'I believe her recovery would have turned my brain with joy. I believe that I should have thrown up work, friends, country, everything in order to devote the remainder of my life to ameliorate the blight of hers. But, situated as I am, *what* would you have me think or do?'

'Does my poor sister know you?' inquired George.

'*Know me!* Not from Adam. She does not even like me. She refuses my caresses; has an aversion to my presence; is uneasy till I quit the room. What comfort can I derive from her recovery, knowing too all the while that this poor girl——'

But here his voice broke, and he could proceed no further.

'It is certainly a most unfortunate occurrence for poor Rita,' observed Mr West.

'Unfortunate! It is an occurrence which, if possible, I would remedy with my life. But you *must* know, Mr West, that I am innocent in this affair. That I had no more doubt of your daughter's death than you had.'

'That is what my father and I have not yet been quite able to satisfy ourselves about, Fane. We certainly always imagined that you had

received unmistakable proof that Daisy was lost in the "Queen of the Wave."'

'So I had—or so I thought I had. There appeared to be conclusive evidence that she had not come on shore with the others, and it was deposed that a young woman answering to her description had died in the boat. Even the official inquiry elicited no further information. What would you have me imagine? What would you or any other man have imagined under similar circumstances, excepting that your wife was dead and you were free to marry again.'

'And she never told her name to any one?'

'How could she tell her name when she has not the slightest consciousness of her own identity. The poor child's brain has been so injured that it is reduced to the level of an infant's. My baby would be far better able to make her way through the world alone.'

'My poor, poor girl,' said the old farmer, covering up his face with his hands.

'When one thinks of what she *was*,' interpolated George.

'Don't, George; don't mention it. It is a thought that I am forced to put away if I would retain my own senses.'

There was silence between the three men for the space of a few seconds, and then Laurence Fane went on as though he were relating a history.

'Well, you know how Margarita, like a healing angel, came to me in my deep trouble. I take God to witness, Mr West, that when I first married that girl, my heart had been so freshly wounded, I thought far more of the dead than I did of her. I used to weep for Daisy's loss, day after day, and instead of resenting my conduct, Margarita would weep with me, until, from clinging to her as my comfort, I came to regard her as my chief good; to value her as my most precious possession. And I cannot tell you what she has been to me. She has consoled my grief, raised my

hopes, and stirred up my ambition. Any position I may have obtained, any fame I may have acquired, I owe to Margarita—to the most loving, faithful wife that man was ever blessed with. And she is more than my wife too, she is the mother of my child; and, God help me, I have brought them down to this?'

'What is it that you wish to do, Fane?' demanded George.

'I want to remedy, as far as is in my power, the fearful evil I have brought upon her. This is no common case, George, which the common laws of morality will fit. It is not as if your poor sister had been restored to me in her right mind, or able even to enjoy the comforts which a residence under my roof can afford her. I have had the opinion of some of the first physicians in London on her case, and they all pronounce it hopeless. The brain has been permanently injured. And our family doctor, Bellew, told me only yesterday, that he considered the poor girl would be

much happier under private care in the country, or even in a private asylum, than she is at present. She is beginning to mope for want of companions.'

'But if you placed her under some such care (which I think would be very prudent), what then?'

'Might not Margarita return to me? Mind, I do not ask that she should return to fill her old position. I know her well, and that she is too pure and high-minded to contemplate such a step. But if I might but still protect and support her! If I might but act the part of father to my child, and know for certain that they were both well and safe, and provided with everything they could desire, I should be—comparatively speaking—happy. I am in affluent circumstances, Mr West, and I have earned all I possess by means of her influence and her encouragement. May she not, in all propriety, accept the home which has been reared through her alone?'

'But what would the world say?' demanded George. 'It is all very well for you, my dear fellow, to talk about only "supporting" and "protecting" Margarita, but the *vox populi* is apt to be rather hard upon such little arrangements, and I don't think she is the woman to stand the breath of scandal.'

'I do not believe that Margarita would care *what* the world said, so long as she knew that she was acting rightly. But I would not subject her to the scrutiny or remarks of her old circle of acquaintance. I would take her far away, to France or Italy—to the Brazils—or Kamschatka—if she will but live with me and let me try to make her happy. She is miserable now, George. You must perceive it. With me Margarita has lost her life.'

'I have perceived it,' replied the other, moodily.

'Then urge your father to persuade her to do as her heart dictates to her. She has a great affection and veneration for you both. She will

listen to you, when she would be afraid to listen to me.'

'What do you say, father?' demanded George.

'I don't know what to say, George. It wouldn't be wrong, I dare say, in the eyes of the Lord, but it would be altogether wrong in the eyes of the world, and we are taught to avoid even the appearance of evil. And yet the poor girl is suffering so deeply—any one can see that, and as Mr Fane has put it, this is not a common case.'

'And there's the bringing up of the child to be considered, too. It's very hard to decide upon.'

'It is not as though Margarita's return could injure any one,' urged Laurence Fane. 'The fact of poor Daisy's reappearance is known to very few, and she is in that condition, poor soul, in which, so long as she is warmed and fed, outward circumstances make no earthly difference to her. Who, then, will be the loser? I will take Margarita to some spot to which the unhappy story of our past lives can never reach. I will respect

her as sacredly as though she were some saint sent from heaven to comfort me, and I will cherish her and work for her and protect her to her life's end or mine. Oh, Mr West, you do not know *what* we have been to one another. Ours has not been an ordinary marriage. It has been a blending of two beings into one life until separation becomes death. I know I have no longer any right to control her actions, but if you will sanction the proposals that I make, Margarita will come back to me and be happy.'

'I cannot sanction anything, Mr Fane. It is for Rita to decide. She is the best judge of what will constitute her own happiness.'

'And *that* would never constitute it,' echoed a hollow voice at the door.

They looked up. Margarita had silently entered the room and overheard her uncle's last words.

'Uncle!—George!—listen to me! I love him as my life. I would lay down my worthless life

this very moment to procure him one hour's happiness. I would rather starve with him, or suffer disgrace with him, or be exiled from all I love for ever, with him, than share the home of any other man in the world, or even live as I am living now. But with all this, *I cannot forget Daisy.* When I thought that she was dead, at rest in the bosom of the Eternal Father, I almost learned to be contented that it should be so; but now I know that she still lives and suffers my heart is never absent from her. Laurence, she is always with me *as she used to be.* Her happy, laughing face smiles on me in my dreams—her merry voice, wherever I may go, seems to be ringing in my ears—and I cannot take from you what is by right my darling's—no, not even in the least degree. The home, the means, the friendship, you so generously offer me—and for offering which I could kneel down and worship you, Laurence—are not yours to give. They belong to Daisy, and were I to take them from her, the food would

choke me, the roof fall in and crush me where I lay. Uncle said just now that it was for me to decide this question, and I have decided it. I cannot share your home, I cannot be more to you than I am now, *whilst Daisy lives.*'

'Then it is of no use my remaining here any longer,' remarked Laurence, with an air of indifference, as he rose and took up his hat. 'Good evening, Mr West. You must forgive me for this intrusion. It will not occur again. George, it is needless for me to tell you, I hope, how glad I shall be to see you if you ever are coming my way.'

'Thanks. I should like very much to run up for a day or two, just to see how matters stand. No, don't say good night, I am going to drive you back to the station.'

And the only consolation afforded to poor Margarita, as the two men left the room, was to see that George linked his arm in that of

Laurence in the same familiar way he used of old.

Virtue is not always its own reward—often a very cold blank feeling of desolation follows our most meritorious efforts to do right.

Margarita felt that now. She had gained the day, but Laurence had departed without saying farewell to her—had passed out into the darkness silently, and left her standing there — alone!

As she turned round she caught the old farmer's eye bent compassionately on her.

'Oh, uncle, uncle!' she exclaimed, vehemently, in a burst of sudden tears, 'when will life be over? when shall we be at rest?'

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

LAURENCE FANE found that there was no train to take him back to London in reasonable time that evening, so he slept at Taunton, and proceeding home the next day made his way straight to Jack Reeves' apartments.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and Mr Reeves, being a press man and up half the nights in the week, was just thinking of taking his breakfast.

'I've thrown my last die, Jack, and it has turned up blanks,' said Fane, as he took a chair opposite his friend. 'The game's over for me in this world, and the sooner my life's over, too, the better.'

'Whatever do you mean, old fellow?' exclaimed the other sympathizingly.

'I've been down to Bushthorne to try and persuade my wife to come back and live with me, and she won't.'

'Did you ever expect that she would?'

'I thought she cared more for me than she did for herself.'

'And would prove her affection by turning your mutual misfortune into a mutual wrong? Come, Fane! be reasonable. There is not a more careless fellow knocking about town than myself, but even I—had Mrs Fane acceded to your wishes, which I knew she never would do—should have thought less of her than I had ever done before.'

'Oh, it's all very well to preach virtue and morality at a man when you have never suffered from the exercise of them yourself. But wait till the woman whom you have considered your wife for the last six years is shoved out of her place by an interloper——'

'Fane! Fane! think of what you are saying!'

'God forgive me. I didn't mean that; my poor Daisy. But if you only knew half the misery I am feeling at the present moment you would not be astonished at my inability to pick my words.'

'I know it, old fellow, and no one feels more keenly for you than I do. I have seen all the love and trust that has made your home so happy for the last few years, and I can well imagine what it is to have it broken up. But, Fane, I can remember another house as well, a little house at Notting-hill with——'

'I know! I know! You needn't torture me with that remembrance. It is the conflict between the two memories that is killing me, Jack! I feel as though I had two hearts—one is given to the past and one to the present, and to whichever thought I turn I commit an injury on the other. *I loved them both so well.*'

'It is an awfully hard case, there's no doubt about that,' said Reeves.

'I don't think I'm a coward, Jack! I believe I could face danger or trouble as bravely as most men. But this struggle between right and wrong, when wrong seems right—this battling against a conscience that is unable to accuse itself—is sufficient to unnerve any one.

> "Give me *something* to meet and to fight,
> I faint with fighting these things of air."'

'You must try and think more of Mrs Fane, Laurence, and less of yourself. That's the only way out of the difficulty that I can see.'

'Think more of her! How can I possibly think more of her than I do?'

'Yet you would expose her to all the appearance of infamy. Mind! I don't say it *would* be infamy: but how is the world to judge? Do you think, for instance, that were she to return to your protection, the ladies of her acquaintance would continue to call upon her?'

'Who cares for a set of scratching, snarling, methodistical old tabbies? Let them sneer and turn up their virtuous noses! There is not one but would behave the same under similar circumstances.'

'You rave, my dear fellow! You know that whatever you may think or feel, in sober sad reality Mrs Fane is *not* your wife, and no amount of argument will make her so.'

'But I would take her far away from everything that could annoy her, Reeves. I would make a home for her in any country she might choose to live in, and no one should ever dare to breathe a word against her—at least in my presence! Even old West thinks the case so cruel a one that he was half persuaded my plan was the best to pursue.'

'And Mrs Fane?'

'She refused to come back to me under any circumstances, and I am in despair.'

'Mrs Fane is wiser and better than both you and old West put together. Come, Laurence, let us go and take a walk. It is no use staying here to cry over spilt milk.'

'I wish you'd come home with me. I can't tell you how I dread entering that house alone. Carson will manage to get us some dinner, and it will be a real charity to give me your company for the evening.'

'All right. So I will.' And consequently they entered Laurence Fane's deserted house together.

As Carson opened the door to them he looked disturbed, and the first thing that greeted their ears, was the sound of loud hysterical weeping from the apartments above.

'What on earth is the matter?' demanded Fane with knitted brows.

'Nothing in particular, sir,' replied the man, and then he added confidentially, 'I think the nurse must be trying to change the mistress's

dress, sir. There's generally a little trouble over the changing of her dress.'

'Oh, very good! Don't let me hear anything about it. Any letters?'

'They're in the library, sir, and a strange gentleman has been twice to see you this morning, and he'll call again to-morrow. He left his name, sir. Mr Dodson.'

'Dodson! What did he look like?'

'Like a legal gentleman, sir, or a doctor, or something of that sort,' rejoined Carson.

'Keeper of a lunatic asylum I shouldn't wonder,' ejaculated Fane, with a hard laugh, as the servant left the room. 'That's a fair accumulation of correspondence for twelve hours, Reeves,' he continued pointing to the batch of letters that was heaped upon his writing-table.

'Yes! Shows what an important man you have become, Fane. Well, it will give you some occupation to answer them all.'

'Exactly so; but I don't mean to begin now.

Come to my room and wash your hands.' Jack Reeves followed his friend mechanically up-stairs. There was something in the atmosphere of the house that oppressed him. As they came opposite to the apartments occupied by Daisy, the door opened and she stepped hastily upon the landing.

She looked very pretty in the blue dress in which Mrs Honeywood had arrayed her; but the tears with which she had resisted being dressed in it were still wet upon her cheeks.

Usually she shrunk like a timid child before the presence of strangers, but in this instance something in the appearance of Jack Reeves seemed to take her fancy, for she crossed to his side of the landing and laid her hand upon his arm.

'I want to see you, to speak to you,' she said hurriedly, 'to ask you where he is?'

It was the first time Reeves had met Daisy since her miraculous recovery, and the wild, care-

worn face that looked up so earnestly in his, and was so painful a contrast to the blooming creature he had parted with, touched him deeply.

'Who is it you want, Mrs Fane?' he said in a subdued voice.

'Why *him*!' the man that loved me so well, you know. Oh, you saw him do it many times when we were all in heaven together. Wasn't it bright there? didn't the angels laugh to see us? But it has grown so cold since he went away.'

'Do you mean Laurence? He has not gone away, Mrs Fane. He is close beside you.'

'I am here, Daisy,' said poor Laurence wearily, 'and I love you as I always did. Come to me, dear! Come and kiss me.'

'Go away,' she began excitedly, as she clung closer to Jack Reeves. 'I don't like you. It is not true.'

Then she raised her wasted face and whispered into the ear of her companion,

'Send that horrid man away! Why should he come between us? If you would send him away and stay here yourself we might ask our way to heaven and find *him* there. Wasn't he beautiful? Only I wish that God had not given him wings, else he might have stayed here for ever. It was cruel of him to fly away,' she continued, weeping.

'You are mistaken, dear Mrs Fane; indeed you are mistaken,' said Reeves. 'Laurence would never have left you. He loved you far too well. Try to remember! You were in a great ship with him, and there was an accident, and he had to put you in a boat——'

'Yes, yes,' she interrupted wildly, 'and the boat went down into the cold water, and he flew up to the sky. I saw him spread his wings and fly to God, and the baby would have gone too, only I held him so fast. Have you ever seen my baby?'

'No! Have you got a baby?'

'Of course I have; and he would be a great beauty too if I could only make him dry. But we went into the water you know, and we have both been wet ever since. Feel my dress—it is soaking,' she continued, as she held up her warm merino sleeve for his inspection.

'She's always a worriting about being wet,' observed Mrs Honeywood, who had joined the party in the staircase. 'Soon as ever I've washed and dried her in the morning she begins the same thing over again. Sometimes she will have it her bed is made of water.'

'It's the last remembrance she had, poor child,' said Fane, and he put out his hand to smooth back the stray locks of hair that were falling into her eyes.

The hard slap which he received upon his cheek in return would have made him laugh, had it come from any hand but hers.

'Don't, my darling,' he remonstrated, with a burning face.

'How dare you?' panted Daisy. 'You monster! I wish *he* were here to punish you! Oh, where is he? Why did he fly away and leave me in the cold? Come back, come back from heaven,' she went on tearfully. 'Where are you that you cannot hear? I call you night and day and you never answer, though I can hear the rustling of your wings close by. You were his friend,' she said to Jack Reeves, with a sudden glimmer of reason, 'why can't you bring him back—why can't you say where they have hidden him?'

'What had I better tell her?' inquired Jack, as he looked from one to another of his companions.

'You had better tell her nothing, sir, but treat it as so much raving,' replied the nurse practically. 'It would be no manner of use if you did. She goes on in that way all day long, but she won't hear a word in favour of her good gentleman, not even when you try it. It's just

so much nonsense and nothing more. She don't understand a word of what she's saying.'

'The woman is impertinent,' said Daisy, with a magnificent air. 'What can she know about that other half that the angels cut away from me? I shall speak to her no more.' And she stalked into the nursery again and shut the door.

The nurse laughed good-humouredly as at a fractious child, and prepared to follow her.

'She'll flood the whole carpet with the water cans if I don't go and see after her, sir. Come, my deary, you open the door. Bless me! if she hasn't turned the key. To think of the sense of that. Well, I must go round and get in through the dressing-room.' And Mrs Honeywood disappeared to put her suggestion into practice.

Reeves walked into his friend's bed-room. Fane was sitting in an arm-chair with his face buried in his hands.

'Come, come, old fellow! this won't do. You must try and get a little more accustomed to the state of affairs or we shall have you breaking down altogether.'

'I shall *never* get accustomed to it, Reeves. You cannot tell what it is. If she would only endure me without recognizing me—but to be slapped and abused without rhyme or reason——'

'You should not go near her.'

'How can I help it, knowing she is in the house? Do you think I have ceased to love her, or that I can entirely forget what we have been to one another? My poor darling! How gay she used to be. How devoted to myself. And now to see the change. It is too awful.'

'She is still devoted to your memory, Fane, but she has no longer the power to link the present with the past. And I think the effect is too depressing for a man of your sensitive organization. You should not have her here.'

'It was a promise,' replied Laurence slowly.

'I promised Margarita not to send her to an asylum.'

'It was like Mrs Fane. I mean it was like—may I call her "Margarita," Laurence?—I get so confused between the two.'

'Oh, call her anything you like, old fellow. You have been my best friend too long to stick at trifles. I don't wonder you get confused between them,' he added with a sad touch of humour. 'I get confused myself sometimes, and don't know which is my wife and which is not.'

'Mrs Fane is in the next room,' replied Reeves gravely. 'There can be no question about that. But, as I was saying, it was like Margarita's kind heart to wish you to have her poor cousin home; but had she known the strain it would entail upon your mind she never would have advised it.'

'Sometimes I say I must put an end to it,' rejoined his friend, wearily, 'but it goes on from day to day, and I haven't the heart to make any

alteration. I did not intend to subject you to the scene we have just passed through, Jack. I thought the poor child was safe in her room. You must forgive me.'

'I am very glad to have had an opportunity of seeing her and judging of the effect her condition has upon yourself. It cannot go on, Laurence, it is killing you.'

'Let us discuss the matter afterwards. I am tired now, and want my dinner. Come down into the study till it is ready.'

CHAPTER VIII.

LAURENCE BECOMES A RICH MAN.

THE first things that attracted Fane's attention on re-entering the study were his letters. He walked up to his table and commenced at once to examine them, whilst Reeves caught up the day's paper, and, throwing himself upon a sofa, was soon deep in its contents. He heard his companion give vent to one or two exclamations of surprise, without taking much notice of him; but when Laurence suddenly leaped from his seat with a violent oath, Jack thought it was time to inquire if anything were the matter.

'Bad news there, Fane?' he said, interrogatively.

'No, not exactly; but I never was so astonished in my life. It has quite taken my breath away. Good heavens; it is impossible!'

'What is impossible?'

'Why this—the intelligence in this letter. And yet it all seems regular enough. There can be no mistake about the respectability of the firm —Manvers and Dodson. It can't be a hoax.'

'My dear fellow! you are keeping me in the most horrible suspense? What is it all about?'

'Haven't I told you? Well! my old godfather, Mr Laurence—the man who brought me up, you know, and then kicked me out—I've often related the story to you——'

'Yes! Yes! Go on!'

'He's dead! poor old chap!'

'Well! I don't see anything very wonderful in that, Laurence. He must have attained a very ripe old age.'

'He was eighty-four.'

'The surprising thing would have been, then, if he had *not* died; and after his disgusting behaviour to you I should hardly think you had much occasion to regret him.'

'Oh, but my dear Jack, do wait a minute, and hear me to the end. The poor old fellow has fully atoned for his misdeeds.'

'What! has he left you anything?'

'He has left me—*everything!*'

'By George! And what does it amount to?'

'If I'm to believe the lawyer's statement, twenty thousand a year.'

'My dear Fane,' cried Reeves, shaking him by the hand, 'I'm so heartily glad to hear it! This really is something like making amends. So he came round at the last, did he?'

'I suppose so, but there are no particulars here but legal ones, and I do not know who should write to me privately. The old man lived alone with his housekeeper. He made few friends.'

'Has he never communicated with you during the last fifteen years?'

'Never! Nor have I intruded myself on his notice by so much as a line. But I suppose he has heard of me in my public career.'

'And this is your reward, and you richly deserve it. Twenty thousand a year. What a field of labour it opens out before you. It could not have come at a better time too.'

'Why, what am I to do with it?' demanded Fane, mournfully. 'Who is to spend it with me?'

'My dear fellow. Don't begin to look at it in that dismal light. *What are you to do with it?* To purchase property, to travel, and to divert your thoughts from the misfortune which has lately come upon you.'

'And of which no riches or amusements can relieve me, Jack! This money is left me unconditionally, and I have already made up my mind what I shall do with it.'

'And that is——'

'To settle it upon Margarita Hay and my child.'

'What! *all* of it?' exclaimed Reeves in amazement.

'Every halfpenny! What use have I for it? My wants are amply supplied, and it is but a very small compensation after all for the irreparable injury I have done that poor girl.'

'She will never accept the sacrifice, Fane.'

'I shall not ask her to do so. I shall simply see that it is made over by a deed of gift to her, and invested in her name.'

'And what do you intend to do yourself?'

'I don't know. I have hardly decided; but I must leave England. The air of the place is killing me. I shall put Daisy under the care of some kind person in the country, and go abroad —to Spain, perhaps to Italy. It matters little to me so that I am out of hearing of her raving and the other's tears.'

'But I do not think you should act as you propose, Fane, without further consideration. You intend to take a step which appears to me as uncalled for as it is unnecessary. To settle a fair amount of this enormous income upon the mother of your child is reasonable enough, but *the whole of it;* twenty thousand a year, upon a woman of such inexpensive tastes as Margarita. Why, what can she do with it? You will only be adding an extra burden to that she has already to bear.'

'It's of no use talking to me in that way, Jack, because my mind is made up. I don't want this money, and I shall not keep it. And I am only too thankful to have the opportunity thrown in my way to show my darling how much I love, and honour, and appreciate her for all she has done for me. It is but a poor return at the best.'

'But—don't be annoyed with me, old fellow, for arguing out the point with you—can you in

justice to others carry out your own wishes in this respect? You have no proof that your wife may not some day recover her senses. Suppose she were to do so! Is she not better entitled to share this fortune with you than Margarita Hay?'

'No! a thousand times, no!' replied Laurence, excitedly, as he struck his hand upon the table. 'What injury have I done her, poor thing? that affliction comes from the God who is my witness that so long as it lay in my power I did all I could to make her life a happy one. But that other dear saint who came to share my misery with me, and raised me up from the depths of despair to the highest pinnacle of joy which man in his human nature is capable of attaining—to her, what can I dedicate less than all my thoughts, my regrets, and my possessions?'

And Laurence Fane threw his head down again upon his arm as he concluded.

'Don't try to dissuade me any more, Reeves, from what is my fixed purpose,' he said, a minute after, as he raised it suddenly again. 'You've been a dear good friend to me, but I don't think you can quite enter into all I feel upon this subject. The instant I realized that old Laurence had left me his money, my decision was made, and the only sensation of gratitude I have experienced for the change in my fortunes is the one I felt on Margarita's account. Do you know, Jack, that she has refused to take any allowance from me since our separation? That she is supporting herself and the child on the stray guineas she may receive for her magazine or newspaper articles? But that is past now, thank God, and she shall toil no more.'

'What do you expect to be the result of this intelligence on her? Do you think that she (who has refused any assistance hitherto) will consent to use the money?'

'If she does not use it, it will lie idle,' said

Fane, in a voice in which his friend could just detect the least possible tone of triumph.

'I read your intention, Laurence! You will settle this vast amount—the use of which would place you far above the necessity of labour—on Margarita Hay, making her feel thereby that, if she accepts it, she will be enjoying luxuries you can never hope to attain, and if she does *not* accept it, she will deprive you and hundreds of others from sharing a benefit which was intended to be diffused throughout society. She must aggrandize herself at your expense, or see the money wasted, and, in any case, she must rob you —unless——'

'Go on! Unless——'

'Fane! I see through your artifice, and it is not worthy of you.'

'How do you know? How can you tell what I mean, or what I feel, until you have been placed in the same miserable position? Why don't you finish your sentence? I know what

you would say—*Unless she will consent to share it with me.* Yes, Jack! you are quite right in your surmise. I may be a brute and a villain, but that is my one great wish and hope. That Margarita, rather than deprive me of this fortune, may consent to return to my protection. I will never touch a farthing of it otherwise.'

'Then you *will* never touch a farthing of it, that's my firm belief,' replied Reeves.

'Wait and see. You don't know half of my darling's love for me.'

'I shall think less of it than I do at present if it can be bought at twenty thousand a year.'

'How *dare* you speak of anything connected with her in such a strain?'

'Now, Laurence; don't quarrel with me because my opinion of her virtue is higher than your own.'

'Dinner is ready, sir,' announced Carson, as he threw open the door.

'No, Jack, we won't quarrel,' said Fane in a

whisper, as he passed his arm through that of his friend and led him into the dining-room. 'Life is too short for that, and we have known each other too long. Only, if you knew the depth of that woman's affection for me, and the capability she has for martyrdom, you would say——'

'That she is very likely to martyrize herself over again in your cause. Perhaps so, Laurence, for she is only a woman; but if you accept the sacrifice I shall think you are less than a man.'

CHAPTER IX.

MRS GEORGE MAKES AN INSINUATION.

THE internal harmony of the domestic arrangements of Maple Farm did not last for ever. Mrs George West, indolent, pleasure-seeking, and vulgar by nature, had been very willing at first to permit her husband's cousin to relieve her of the cares of housekeeping, and the superintendence of the dairy and the poultry-yard. She had always considered such things far beneath the attention of a 'real lady,' and agreed with her mamma, the elegant Mrs Hughes, that if 'Mr George' had any consideration for his wife he would never have asked her to 'demean' herself by remembering that the sale of such articles of consumption as butter, eggs, and milk had anything to do with

their yearly income. So, when Margarita appeared and offered humbly to resume her supervision over the dairy-maids and poultry-woman, Mrs West not only accepted the offer with alacrity, but informed her mamma that she was delighted to have found such an assistant, and that it was a charity to give Rita any active employment, poor thing, to keep her mind from dwelling on the misfortune that had overtaken her. And the elegant Mrs Hughes had answered that it 'was just like her Carrie to think of it, and lor' 'twas a shocking thing for the family, and uncommonly good of Carrie to take the poor creature in, and all she hoped was that the unfortunate child Daisy wouldn't corrupt Master George and Miss Caroline,' and the rest of the pug-nosed little animals she called her grandchildren. None of this reached Margarita's ears. If it had done, friendless as she was, she would have dragged her wounded heart to some other shelter, for she was proud as Lucifer where her own reputation or

that of her beloved Laurence was concerned.

So she went on quietly doing the duties she had undertaken, and many others added to them (for Mrs George West piled new burthens on her willing shoulders every day), until after Laurence had paid that visit to the old farmer and herself, and gone away again angry and defeated.

Carrie had not been in the house during that interview, and she was terribly curious concerning it. She wanted to know all that had been said and done, and if any arrangements for the future had been entered into, and she appealed to her husband and his cousin in vain.

Margarita refused at once to give her any information. She appeared hurt and offended at the question being put to her, and said that confidence between husband and wife was a thing that no one should desire to meddle with.

'Yes, between a *husband and wife!* certainly,' repeated Mrs West, with an intonation that brought the blood hotly to Margarita's cheeks.

But she took no notice of the remark. It might have been unintentional, and it was, without doubt, true.

George West did not meet his wife's inquiries with half the temperateness that Margarita had done. He flew into a rage at once, demanded what the devil business it was of hers, and commanded her, under all sorts of penalties, never to mention the subject to him or his cousin again.

This had not the effect of inclining Mrs West's heart more favourably towards the interlopers. She had already begun to suspect that her husband was more interested in the case than there was any occasion for him to be, and from that day Margarita's presence at Maple Farm ceased to give satisfaction to the mistress of it. Every word of praise he bestowed upon her, every caress that was given to her child, became a fresh offence. If the old man rubbed his hands over the marketing accounts and observed that the fowls yielded more eggs and the cows more milk

than they had done for twelve months past, his daughter-in-law would toss her head with the remark that she 'saw nothing so very wonderful in that, considering that the spring was coming, of which an increase of both commodities was the natural result;' and if George praised the dinner, or declared it was the best he had tasted for a long time, his wife was certain to inform him, after the pattern of her elegant mamma, that 'she had not been brought up to "demean" herself by cooking, and that it was a pity he had not married a scullery-maid instead of a "real lady," when his dinners might have been more to his general liking.'

And when George, stung into retort, replied that 'he wished to goodness he had,' Mrs West would retire in a burst of tears, and be confined to her room for the rest of the day with a genteel headache. All this jealousy and petty malice became intolerable to Margarita. At first she was too much occupied by her own trouble to

observe it, but after a while it forced itself upon her notice, and she felt that Maple Farm could not remain her home. The idea of leaving it made her very sad. It is true that Mrs West was a woman with whom she could never assimilate, even in her simplest days, and whose manners became unbearable when contrasted with those of the society she had been lately used to. Still there were her uncle and her cousin George; there were all the places and things with which her earliest years had been associated, and Margarita had not felt completely desolate at Bushthorne.

But she hardly liked to think what her life would be like, cut off from all her old associations and bereft of the sunshine that had so gloriously illuminated it. She shuddered at the desolate prospect. She could not stay where she was, subjected to Carrie's daily innuendos and coarse remarks, yet she stood like one shivering on the brink of cold water, not daring to take the plunge

that should carry her forward to a life that might prove even more unbearable than the present one.

It was at this juncture that Laurence's letters proved an awful temptation to her.

He did not fail to write, and every second morning or so brought her a long epistle filled with such protestations, entreaties, and regrets, that her loving courageous spirit quailed before the answers that she felt compelled to send him.

He did not say a word about the fortune that had been bequeathed him, because Jack Reeves' remonstrances had produced a temporary effect upon him, and made him resolve at least to try every other means of regaining Margarita before he resorted to that. But he entreated her again and again to let him visit her, and she refused so often without making any visible impression on him, that at last she persuaded her uncle to write him a letter desiring in his own name, and for his niece's sake, that Mr Fane would not, under pre-

sent circumstances, present himself again at Maple Farm. This letter was conclusive. No answer came to it, and Margarita was weak enough to feel bitterly disappointed because her efforts had been successful. She had strength to do what was right, but she had not strength (and how few of us have!) to rejoice at the result of her fortitude. One evening (this was about a month after Laurence had received the news of his godfather's bequest) Margarita was feeling unusually low and miserable.

Carrie had been in a particularly bad humour all day, and at dinner-time she told her husband that her cousins, the Newtons, 'the very dearest girls in the world, and with whom she had been as intimate as if they had been her sisters,' had arrived on a visit to her mamma at Taunton, and 'it did seem hard that she could not have the pleasure of receiving them in her own house.'

'What's all the row about?' said George,

indifferently; 'ask them here by all means if you want to do so.'

'Oh, it isn't what I want or don't want!' replied Carrie, with a toss of the head. 'It's the impossibility of asking them that bothers me.'

'I don't see it. They can sleep together in the large back bed-room. Quite good enough for them I should think.'

'You're so coarse in your remarks, George, that I hardly know how to answer you. I was not thinking of the room. But the Newtons are such perfect ladies, and have been brought up so genteelly——'

'That the company of every one here but yourself will not be good enough for them, I suppose. Well, let them stay away then. Nobody wants to see them.'

'It's not that I mean at all,' replied his wife, with an air of offence.

'Then what the d——l do you mean?' exclaimed George.

'I decline to tell you. But there are circumstances which would make it extremely unpleasant for two such genteel girls as my cousins, who have been brought up in the strictest manner by their papa—I have known him lock them up in their room for a day for only speaking to a tradesman in the street—and of course—however, I shall say no more. I shall NOT ask them to visit me; but I think it is rather hard, considering I've been married for eight years and only had my mamma to stay with me once, and then you were so rude to her, George, that she said it was the first and last time.'

'Oh, do hold your tongue, or leave the room!' cried her husband, impatiently.

Mrs West had adopted the latter alternative, and waddling past them with a look of offended majesty, left the cousins by themselves.

'George, I *must* leave Maple Farm,' said Margarita, sadly.

'Leave us, Rita! Why?'

'Can't you see at whom her hints are directed, and that the *circumstances* which prevent her asking her cousins here, are the presence of myself and little Daisy.'

'By Jove! if I thought she meant it——'

'Dear George, don't be angry with her. She acts according to her lights; and after all, you know, it is true; I am not married, and I have a child. It is better we should not live in a respectable household—and I have been foolish and selfish to permit it to go on so long. Yes, I know all that you would say, and I thank you for it, dear cousin, with all my heart. But I made up my mind whilst Carrie was speaking, and I shall keep to it. As soon as ever I can form my plans I shall leave you.'

'Where for, dear Rita?'

'Oh, never mind *where for*. Not very far off, I dare say, but I have not even begun to think of it.'

'And what are we to do without you? The

dairy will go to rack and ruin again. Carrie is far too fine a lady to look after the farm business.'

'I hope not, but even if it were so, George, I *could not* stay here after what your wife insinuated just now, for Laurence's sake as well as my own. Don't think I shall not be sorry to go. Living in the old place and seeing your face and uncle's have been the only things hitherto that have made my life bearable to me. But that I should leave you is inevitable, and the more quietly you let me go, the less I shall feel the parting.'

He did not say another word to combat her resolution; he was too well aware of the truth of what she had spoken, but he took up little Daisy on his knee, and kissed her several times warmly.

'I should have liked to have been a father to this little one, Rita,' he observed presently, 'but you know best.'

And so they parted with the mutual understanding that she was to go.

Margarita left Daisy playing with the other children, and putting on her hat and shawl sauntered slowly out into the lonely lanes that surrounded Maple Farm. Her blood was still boiling with the affront that Mrs West had offered her, and she wanted a little time to herself to think over what was best to do.

She had so steadily refused any assistance from the father of her child that, although not penniless, her funds were at too low an ebb to permit her to act without due caution. She knew that London was the place where she was likely to get most employment for her pen, and yet she dreaded the risk she would continually run there of meeting Laurence, and the temptation the knowledge of his being so near at hand, would prove to her. For her love for him was so intense—her yearning to see him again so strong—that she knew

her only safety lay in keeping out of his reach altogether. Her virtue was not of that Spartan order that could be guaranteed to resist for ever the passionate pleadings of the one man she loved on earth. Even the thought of him brought with it a violent struggle between duty and inclination. She knew her own weakness and dared not subject it to further trial. She hated right, but she intended to do it, and therefore she came to the conclusion that she must not take up her residence in London.

In the suburbs, perhaps at Richmond, or Wimbledon, or Streatham, where her child might breathe fresh air and a few pence would bring her to the metropolis, she might venture to make her home.

Home! Ah! what a heartless empty word it seemed to Margarita when it referred to any spot she could not share with him—her guide and guardian and protector—her idolized Laurence.

'I have no protector now,' she said in the bitterness of her heart; 'from even my natural guardians I am compelled to part. I am driven out from every home I have ever known. I am a wanderer upon the face of the earth. Oh, Laurence, Laurence, my dearest, my beloved. Is there a God in heaven that He can sit by and see me now and have no pity?'

She spoke aloud, as people of fervid temperament sometimes do, when they believe that they are quite alone, and their feelings overstep the bounds of their reason.

She did not mean what she was saying. No woman had firmer faith in the existence of the Almighty than Margarita Hay, but the words forced themselves from her lips, as though she must make them heard at the gates of heaven itself. They were answered from a quarter she little expected.

She had been walking with her eyes cast upon the ground. As the last passionate words fell

from her lips, she clasped her hands tightly together, and threw her eyes up to heaven.

As they descended to earth again they lit on a figure standing a few paces in advance of her—on the figure of Laurence Fane.

CHAPTER X.

FOR THE LAST TIME OF ASKING.

HE looked wild, desperate, almost wicked, as he walked straight upon her and clasped her in his arms.

'Oh, Laurence!' she exclaimed, when the first shock of meeting him had subsided, 'how unkind, how cruel this is of you. After all my letters, my entreaties, my prayers! I did not think you would treat me so.'

'You did not think I would thirst to see you again, to hold you in my arms as I am holding you now? You believed that with me separation meant forgetfulness, that silence would trample down desire? You are not speaking the truth to me, Margarita!'

'No! No! You know what I mean. I thought you loved me too well to subject me again to the misery of telling you we must not meet!'

'I love you too *much*, Margarita, to condemn you to the misery you are suffering now. How altered you are in face, and figure, and complexion. How this separation is telling on your health and spirits!'

'Yes, I suffer,' she answered simply, 'there is no help for that, and how could it be otherwise? But as I have told you in my letters, Laurence, it is God's will that I suffer *alone*.'

'I do not believe it. I *cannot* believe it. For if so, why did He place you under my care for so many years? Why did He permit our hearts and lives to become so blended that they cannot exist apart? Why did He make us the parents of that unfortunate child?'

'Oh, do not ask me!' she said, as she struggled from his hold. 'How can I answer such questions as those? You are torturing me for no-

thing. I do not know. I cannot even surmise. All is dark and incomprehensible to me except one thing, and that is—that whatever we *have* been, Laurence, we can never be again.'

'You are preaching the cold, selfish sophistry of the world,' he said gloomily, as he walked a little apart from her. 'I thought I had married a woman with a heart, Margarita, but you are, after all, capable of no greater sacrifice than the rest of your sex. You can share a man's prosperity with him, but when it comes to sharing shame and rebuke and the world's contempt, you bring morality to your aid, and cry "Shame" upon him for the very notion.'

'*Tell me exactly what it is you want me to do,*' she said, in measured tones, which yet were tones of desperation.

Slowly as the question was put, he gathered hope from it, and answered eagerly,—

'I am going abroad, my darling. I am going to make a new home for myself in some foreign

country, where society shall have heard nothing of my unfortunate story and be unable either to commiserate or blame me. I am a rich man, Margarita. My old godfather died last month and bequeathed the whole of his fortune to me. I am the possessor of twenty thousand a year.'

He looked keenly at her as he pronounced the words, but though she started with astonishment there was no other feeling visible on her speaking countenance at the reception of the news.

'Yes, love. An income to set me for ever above the need of work, or the necessity of care. What could one not do in some new country, say Italy, or Spain, or America, Margarita, with twenty thousand pounds a year? Buy lands, rear palaces, possess every luxury. Live free and happy to one's heart's content. But what would such a life be to me, alone? You ask me what I want? I want to surround those who have any legal claim on me with every comfort that money

can afford them, and then I want to take my wife and child, my best, only treasures, far away from England, and lavish all my wealth, as I have long lavished all my affection, on their beloved and honoured heads. This is what I want,—you one, only love of my heart! My dearest, dearest wife.'

'Oh, Laurence,' she exclaimed, flinging herself into his arms, '*who* could hold out against you? I am *very, very* weak, but I feel at this moment as though, did hell yawn on the other side, there is no course open to me but to fly to you who are my life and my everything.'

'I knew it,' he said triumphantly. 'I felt that, hold out long as you might, you would come back to your true rest at last, Margarita.'

'It is not the money!' she sobbed, as she clung convulsively to him. 'Do not think, Laurence, that it is the money. But the world is all so barren and dark, and my heart is hungry for your affection. I think of you all day and all night. I have longed, till I thought I should die of long-

ing, to hear the tones of your voice, to feel the pressure of your hand. I have put the thought away from me as a temptation of the devil—but it is my fate, and I can resist no longer. Oh, my Laurence—my own! Hold me closer. Let me be sure that you are here and that I shall not wake and find it is all a dream.'

'I am here, my dearest. It is, indeed, I who hold you. I—your lover and your husband! Margarita, my Margarita, what a hell we have passed through! Thank God that heaven lies before us once again.'

'I have prayed so that I might overcome my love for you,' she moaned, half to him and half to herself. 'I have placed it in its very worst light. I have called it by all the hardest names that I could think of. Yet there it remained, indelibly impressed upon my heart, bearing down even my prayers in the intensity of its being.'

'I have not *lived* since we parted,' he answered, in the same soft tones. 'My existence

has been so lonely and hopeless without you that it would have become sinful, but for the one blessed hope that time might make you as unable to live alone as I am.'

'Do you think it needed any time for that, dearest? From the very moment I left you I have been the most forlorn of all God's creatures.'

'How could you use such violence against nature, Margarita? Are we not *one?* Can a body exist divided? Ah, love, what a bitter mistake for both of us. But happily it is over. Let us talk no more of it. How is the child?'

'Quite well, dear Laurence.'

'And why were you here alone?'

'I had come out for a little quiet thought. I was about to leave the Farm. I wished to decide what to do next.'

'Were you unhappy here, my love—I mean apart from the misery of our separation?'

'A little, dearest. My cousin's wife does

not entirely sympathize with my position, and she——'

'She dared to tell you so—to openly reproach you——?'

'Not quite that; but her insinuations were difficult to bear.'

'And this,' he said, fiercely, 'is what I have brought upon your sinless head. But I will make amends to you, Margarita. As there is a God in heaven, my future life shall be spent in making amends to you for the insults to which you have been subjected.'

'Oh, *I am* so happy,' she sighed with her head upon his breast.

'Dear love; and so am I. You must come with me at once, Margarita. I will not let you remain one night more beneath the same roof with that woman. I shall take you and the child up to town by an evening train, and if you do not care to return to the same house—yet understand me, love—I will place you at an hotel until we can

leave England together. It will not be long first. Dr Bellew has already spoken to me of the necessity of removing poor Daisy into the country, and has recommended her being placed under the care of— What is the matter, dearest? Are you ill?' For the grey ashen hue that had commenced to steal over Margarita's flushed and happy features, and the sudden scared look that had come into her eyes, and the working of the lips that had so lately pressed his own, were enough to make any one ask if she were not suffering mortal agony.

'Speak to me, Margarita! You frighten me.' She disengaged herself from his embrace, and stood before him. She was speechless, but the grey shade stole down from her forehead to her mouth till, like the shadow of Death, it had overspread the whole of her countenance. Still she could not find words in which to comply with his request.

'*My darling! What is this?*'

'Memory, Laurence,' she at last contrived to utter, 'bitter memory! Oh, the awful waking up after a dream of heaven! Yet how *could* I have forgotten?'

'What have you forgotten, dearest?'

'*Her*,—you,—myself,—God,—*everything*,' she exclaimed, with such rapidly increasing excitement her last word almost amounted to a scream. 'I have been playing on the brink of hell, and you—you, who were God-appointed to lead me in the right way—you have been the one to blind me to my danger. Oh, Laurence, it were better you had killed me as I stood than have raised my hopes to such a pinnacle of happiness, only to dash them to the ground again. *Your wife*—whilst Daisy lives. No! never. Your slave—your mistress—if you will—but *your wife* I can never be again. And this is the depth of degradation to which your love would drag me. But I am recalled to myself in time—thank God in time

—and I will not listen to your entreaties nor look upon your face one moment longer.'

So saying, she turned from him, and before he could say a word in his own defence, or use a single argument to deter her from her purpose, ran swiftly up the lane in the direction of Maple Farm, and disappeared without having even turned her head to look back at him.

Laurence Fane was completely taken by surprise. At first he thought to pursue her, but believing it would be useless he watched her, foiled and disappointed, till she was out of sight, and then walked slowly whence he had come.

He had but one card left. He determined to play it without delay, and know the worst at once.

CHAPTER XI.

MARGARITA IS PERPLEXED.

WHEN Margarita reached home she found a further trial awaiting her. George had been speaking to his father of the resolution she had come to of leaving Bushthorne, and the old man had worked himself up into a passion concerning it, the upshot of which was that both the men attacked Carrie on the subject, and brought that lady considerably to her bearings, so much so that the first words with which she greeted Margarita's return were those of apology.

'I've been looking for you high and low,' she said, as my poor heroine dragged her exhausted form into the sitting-room. 'There's been such a commotion in the house, you never heard!'

'Not Daisy!' cried Margarita, quickly. There

seemed nothing left for her to lose now except his child.

'Oh, lor! no! None of the children! Only George has been going on at me so about the Newtons, and the old gentleman thought fit to join in, and they've nearly driven me crazy between them. But I'm sure I never meant to say anything to offend you, and had no idea you'd take it so!'

'I don't understand,' Margarita answered feebly.

'Why, didn't you tell George you were going away because I said my cousins couldn't come here!'

'Oh, ah! yes!—to be sure!' she replied, remembering.

'Well, your uncle's very angry, so I hope you'll think better of it, for it'll be very disagreeable for me if you *do* go. And when I mentioned the Newtons, I'm sure not so much as a thought of you ever came into my head.'

At this juncture Margarita began to understand that Mrs George West's advances were intended for an apology, made at the instigation of her husband and father-in-law.

'Don't say any more about it, Carrie, please. I will believe anything you like, and it does not make much difference to me any way.'

So Carrie took her departure, believing she had made ample amends for her behaviour, and Margarita trusted the subject would not be renewed. But she found it was but the beginning of evil.

'So Carrie and you have made it up again,' said her cousin, as he came in to supper. 'So glad to hear it. You mustn't try to run away from us now, eh, Rita?'

'Indeed, George, I see no other course——'

'Nonsense! What's to prevent you remaining here? You should have heard what father said about it this afternoon. He was nearly mad over the idea. And didn't he give it to Carrie.'

I never saw the old gentleman come out so strong before.'

'I am very sorry! It will make even my memory distasteful to her.'

'Rita! I won't have you speak in that way. This is your own natural home, and I tell you, once for all, my wife shall go out of it sooner than you shall. But here comes father. Now you'll hear what he's got to say about it.'

Farmer West entered the room slowly and with difficulty. He had travelled up to town to see his daughter a few weeks before, and every one observed the difference the sight had made in him. He had come back subdued, miserable, crushed. Margarita dreaded his reproaches and entreaties more than those of the rest of the world. She knew how keenly he had felt the sad events of the last few years, and that in losing her for the second time he would feel as if he were bereaved of both his daughters. She remembered how much he had loved Daisy, and

trembled at the thought of what arguments he might use to combat her present resolution.

'Father,' cried George, as the old man took his seat at the head of the table, 'Rita won't stay all the same!'

'Hasn't Carrie done as she promised?' interrupted the farmer, with a frown.

'Indeed she has,' said Margarita, quickly. 'She met me very kindly, and told me that it was all a mistake, but, but——'

'But you prefer to leave us, my dear?'

'Oh, uncle! don't speak to me like that. I would prefer to remain here, where I was so happy, *once*,'—replied Margarita, sobbing,—'to the end of my life, or yours. Where else have I to go to? Who else has any claim upon my services? But, *I cannot*. It is too near *him*, uncle; it is far too near *her*. The whole place is filled with such sorrowful remembrances. It is breaking my heart!'

'Poor child. I can feel for you,' said the old

man, brokenly. 'But where can you go, Rita, and avoid remembrance?'

'I cannot tell!'

'Leaving us will not bring you and Fane together again,' interposed her cousin; 'and it will expose you and the child to the want of protection, and be an awful blow to my father here.'

'Don't let her think of me, George! I want her only to think of herself. What good is to be obtained by quitting the shelter of Maple Farm?'

'You will be liable to all sorts of insults, my poor girl, and without a soul to stand up for you.'

'George is right, Rita! Here, at least, you have two friends who would lay down their lives in your defence.'

'And tear the tongue out of any man who dared to say otherwise!'

'Oh, I know it! I know it! You are only too good and kind to me,' she answered, tearfully.

'And as for my wife,' continued her cousin,

'I tell you, on my word of honour, Rita, that if she ever dares to insinuate a word against you again, I'll give her such a lesson as she will not easily forget. And she knows it, too! She knows it!'

'Think of your infant, my dear,' said her uncle. 'Left at home, perhaps for hours, by herself, whilst you are out on business. Here, at least, she is safe, and well looked after. It is a serious change which you are contemplating, Rita.'

It had begun to assume a serious aspect to her. Even as her uncle and cousin were using their arguments against her Margarita saw a vision of Daisy ill or dying whilst she was away, or herself perhaps called on to leave the world—and the child, protectionless, behind her. What were cross looks, insinuations, insults, compared to this?

'You will consider a little more before you make your final decision,' said Mr West, coax-

ingly. 'You will not leave us in a hurry, Rita?'

'I will not, indeed, dear uncle.'

'I have not liked to advance my own interests, lest I should appear selfish, but your departure would be a great blow to me, my dear. I have but you left now, remember. I have but you left now! Poor Daisy!'

'I have been horribly selfish,' cried Margarita, as she jumped up and embraced the old man affectionately. 'I have been thinking only of myself and my own comfort, and nothing of you, without whose care I might never have survived my infancy. Dear uncle, from this time let me be your daughter, and claim from me the same obedience that our beloved Daisy would have rendered you.'

'Thank you, my child, I can never feel entirely bereaved whilst you are with me. And my first request is that—at all events for the present—you banish all idea of leaving Maple Farm from your mind.'

'I will,' replied Margarita, resolutely, as she sat down to the supper table and endeavoured to interest herself in the topics of general conversation.

But though, in the fervour of the moment, the words were easy to say, they were very difficult to hold by. Alone in her own chamber, lying wakeful by the side of her sleeping child, Margarita recalled the meeting in the lane, and felt instinctively that so long as Laurence knew where to find her he would never relinquish either the hope of winning or the attempt to win her back to him again.

And as she thought of it she trembled.

It was all very well for her to have been heroic that afternoon. She took no merit of it to herself—God and a loving memory had come to her, at the very moment they were most needed, and saved her from confederacy in a great wrong. But what should she have done, left to herself? Margarita knew her own weakness! She knew

her love for Laurence to be so overwhelming that in his presence she was no longer mistress of herself, and she *dared* not meet him!

Some people will suggest that this was not virtue, and that had the woman been more assured of her own strength of purpose she would not have shrunk from putting it to the test. There are always people ready to cavil at any phase of character presented for their consideration, and to be certain that whatever was done was not the right thing to do. They carry their denunciations into real life, and condemn the whole world by the simple method of pretending to be so innocent themselves that they cannot even believe evil of it. 'It is *impossible* that Miss Butterfly can have accepted Captain Daddy Longlegs before she broke off her engagement with young Chrysalis.' *They will not listen* to the report that Sir Algernon Applecheeks married Lady Applecheeks at the very time he was carrying on a correspondence with Mrs Flittertigibbet. *They*

cannot believe that Mrs Dashaway's pale face and melancholy airs are due to her having had the strength of mind to banish Lord Charles Foodle to a staff appointment in India. *If such things are*, don't let these virtuous spokesmen and women hear of them. They would rather close their ears to anything so scandalous, and pass through the world believing it to be a palace of truth and simplicity; and all the dwellers therein, such as they would have you think themselves. But, unfortunately for them, those who 'live and learn' know that this extremity of innocence or ignorance (whichever you may choose to call it) belongs but to two classes of people—those who are too foolish to understand, and those who are too wise to let you see they do. The over-foolish are by far the least numerous, for a fool must be a fool indeed who wastes his breath in arguing sincerely that in this nineteenth century there are no more 'cakes and ale.' A fool of this description would scarcely be considered capable of

moving in society at all, and would in all probability be engaged in disseminating his doctrines somewhere on the Redhill line. But the over-wise and under-truthful may be met with everywhere. It is so easy to look horrified at sin, it is so excellent an evidence of the purity of our own mind. To pity the sinner, to condole with his weakness, to sympathize with his punishment, this augurs we should do exactly the same ourselves under similar circumstances. But to exclaim, to protest, to turn pale, to shriek, to vehemently deny and as vehemently condemn, all this is so easy, *and looks so well!* Lady Applecheeks, who lived for twenty years in an out-of-the-way country village, and came to Sir Algernon's arms utterly ignorant of the commonest rules of society, since which blissful event he has taken good care she shall have no confidantes but her governess and her children—who is moreover so heavy in hand and so uninteresting in appearance, that no man except her lawful owner would

take the trouble to address her a second time; Lady Applecheeks, *par exemple*, would be the first to condemn Mrs Flittertigibbet (did she know anything about that lady's private affairs, which Sir Algernon has carefully provided against) as a '*most shocking woman*, with the lowest notions about morality—a kind of person that no *lady* ought to know' (with a huge stress upon upon the term '*lady*,' as though that and 'virtue' were strictly synonymous). Well, Lady Applecheeks, perhaps you are right! But could you but know that the reason you were elevated to the not entirely enviable position you now maintain, was, because Sir Algernon felt that, at all risks, he must place an insuperable barrier between himself and the charm that had been woven about him by that despised Mrs Flittertigibbet, perhaps you would not sleep so easily upon his cambric shirt front as you do! And could you have seen the tears, the prayers, the strength of mind, the invincible resolution with which—God help her!—that *shocking*

woman 'tore the image which had no business there, from her heart, and trampled its very memory beneath her feet,' even *your* innocence might be enlightened, and your marble virtue, which has never been assailed, melt into sympathy for a fellow-creature's woe.

It is so easy to judge our neighbour for yielding to the temptation which has never been presented to ourselves. If we took the trouble to answer the objections of such cavillers as I have described, it should be by the question, 'Have you ever been placed in the same position'? Have you ever been so circumstanced that whilst your reason and the principles in which you have been reared say 'this is wrong,' your heart and your nature—those loving, living things that bear down all else before them—call out, '*It is right*'? Have you ever seen Love and Life beckoning to you from one side?—have heard their joyous voices crying 'Come'?—have watched their open arms waiting to receive you?—have felt every

pulse in your body leaping to go forth to them? And, on the other, a marble hand, known to be there rather than seen through the mist of your weak tears, that holds you from advancing.

Some permit this hand to stay them. Others break from its grasp, and rush onward, panting! The first bear the impress of those marble fingers to the grave; the last will probably have as deep a mark furrowed on the cheeks by their own tears before they reach it! For both there is but one relief—heaven! Ah, Lady Applecheeks, have you ever dreamt of griefs like these? Think of them next time—just for one moment—before you condemn.

The marble hand of duty was on Margarita now. Throughout the darkness she felt the pressure of it, and watched the beckoning of Love's finger, and heard the singing of the voices that said 'Come!' She had promised her uncle that she would give up the idea of leaving Maple Farm, and already she was sorry she had done so.

She had been thinking only of Carrie's unpleasant conduct, and the possibility of enduring it; but what was that compared with the danger that threatened her? Laurence had disregarded both her entreaties and those of her uncle. There was no safeguard against her seeing him again. And there was always the child as excuse for his paying them a visit.

Margarita pondered it all the livelong night, and rose from her bed more uneasy than she had lain down. Her first resolution had returned in full force upon her mind, but she felt puzzled and perplexed to think how, after that interview with her uncle, she should ever put it into execution.

CHAPTER XII.

LAURENCE'S LAST CARD.

THE post, as may well be supposed, only came in to Bushthorne from Taunton once a day. The superannuated old labourer, who had been raised to the enviable position of letter-carrier, and whose trembling legs used to look still more shrunk and knock-kneed in the regulation small-clothes than they had done in his ploughman's breeches, might generally be seen taking his slow way into the village about noon. In former times the question of his passing or not passing used to be of very little moment to the residents at Maple Farm, whose best interests were assembled beneath the homestead, but since Margarita had returned to Bushthorne, the hour of twelve was (to her

at least) one of the most feverish anxiety. She could see the old postman, as he solemnly plodded along the unsheltered pathway, for a quarter of a mile before he reached the house, and she was unable to settle herself to anything for suspense until he arrived. If he brought a letter from Laurence she would seize it eagerly and conceal it in her dress till she had an opportunity of reading it alone, which she would do with many tears, blaming herself and the writer all the time —the one for sending, the other for taking such delight in the reception of an unlawful pleasure. Yet if the postman passed the farm gate, or brought an epistle from Miss Folkes or any other friend instead, the poor creature's spirits would fall to zero, and she would feel incapable of dragging through the work that lay before her.

Two days after she had given the promise to her uncle, which she feared she should find it so difficult to perform, Margarita was delivering her orders in the dairy, when the kitchen clock struck

twelve. Immediately she became absent, restless, and uneasy; and, having committed one or two egregious blunders so as to make the dairy-maids laugh, she walked out into the front garden (that garden where, long ago, Daisy had told her her happy secret under cover of a syringa bush), and looked eagerly over the pasture land that lay between it and the gate.

Yes! there was the old man, punctual to a minute, slowly limping up to the house.

Some instinct prompted her to go and meet him. She felt she could not wait until he reached her. The fact of being intercepted before he gained the door was of itself distracting to the letter-carrier, and he was a long time fumbling in his leather bag for the necessary documents. At last he produced them, and they were both for her!

'What can this be?' thought Margarita, as she turned a stout blue envelope, directed in a strange writing, over and over in her hand.

Some half-formed fear that it might contain ill news of Laurence or of Daisy, assailed her. She tore it open. She could hardly have been more startled had her idea proved correct. It was from Messrs Manvers and Dodson. She read the words of their communication in blank amazement. The meaning did not so much as strike her senses. It was too overwhelming. It was too absurd to be true.

But Laurence's letter (the other was from Laurence) bore the same import.

Margarita stood out on the open pathway striving to realize its intention long after the venerable postman had hobbled out of sight, and then she walked slowly, and as if she were dreaming, to her own bed-room, and locked the door and sat down and went over the words again mechanically, and was as far from grasping all it involved as ever.

'Dearest Margarita,—You refuse to share my

home or my fortune—to relinquish one inch of the rigid rule of morality you have laid down for yourself, or to shed one ray of comfort on my desolate existence, but you cannot refuse to accept that which I have put it out of my own power to retain. By this post you will have an official notice from my solicitors, Messrs Manvers and Dodson, to the effect that they have received my orders to make over and settle on you, for your sole use and maintenance, the fortune that has just been unconditionally bequeathed to me by my godfather. You may consider it very heroic to refuse all help at the hands of the man who has been your husband for so many years past, but I do not choose that my wife and child should go penniless through the world, and if you refuse this gift on your own account you would hardly have a right to do so on Daisy's. You will not let me have the benefit of my poor child's company nor the pleasure of seeing her grow to womanhood, but you will at least acknowledge I

am justified in demanding that she shall be reared in the station she was born in, and at the expense that I think fit. Give her all the luxury and education that money can procure, make her just such another woman as yourself, but don't let her quite forget her unfortunate father. Be happy, Margarita, without me, if you can! For myself, I lay at your feet but that which is utterly worthless to me, without you.—LAURENCE FANE.'

She read this letter over, perhaps a dozen times, her heart beating rapidly the while, then she turned again to that from the lawyers.

Yes, it was true. He had actually been mad enough to give this insensate order and found men mad enough to assist him. And he tried to throw the onus of it on his solicitude for Daisy. He attempted to shield himself behind his love for his child.

At any other moment Margarita's heart would have melted at the idea of Laurence's affection for

his little girl, but here she saw too clearly that it was but a trap to catch her by. He endowed her with his rich fortune on the score of the infant's needs. He laid her under a heavy obligation, that she might feel all the while they lived apart that she was depriving him of luxuries he might have to work hard to obtain, and of his child's society to which he was entitled by right of nature.

But as the full meaning of his bequest reached her understanding, Margarita made up her mind —Laurence should have back his child. He should no longer make Daisy an excuse for bribing her mother with his gold.

She rose—not softened, but indignant—for this last stratagem on Fane's part had compelled her to a course of action which was as foreign as it was hateful to her nature. She had promised her uncle to fill his daughter's place, and she must break her promise. More than that, she must leave him in complete ignorance why she did so.

She moved softly about her room after she had arrived at this resolution, putting her few articles of clothing together as quietly as she could. Then she walked down-stairs—still as though she were in a dream—and visited the stables.

'Tom,' she said to a helper, 'didn't I hear the master say you were to take the cart into Taunton this afternoon!'

'True for you, miss. I be to fetch out th' oats.'

'My big box wants something doing to it. Will you take it in and leave it at the King's Head? Mrs Johnson will see that it is mended for me.'

'Very good, miss.'

'And Tom—would you mind fetching it down from my room while we're at dinner? And don't make a noise; Mrs West is rather particular, you know, Tom.'

'I'll be as quiet as a cat watching a mouse, miss.'

The pale-faced lady, who had had a 'misfortune,' as the domestics kindly explained it, was such a favourite with the farm servants, and 'the young mistress,' as they called Mrs West, was so much disliked by them, that they would have done anything to oblige the one and slight the other; so the big box was carried down to the cart, and conveyed to Taunton, without anybody but its owner being the wiser for it.

'I'm going for a drive with Daisy,' Margarita said, as they rose from the early dinner table.

'It'll do you good,' observed her uncle, 'for you're looking very pale. Shall you go in the gig?'

'No; Mrs Redstone said I might have their pony-chaise, and her little boy will come too. Good-bye, uncle; God bless you.'

'God bless you, my dear,' responded the old man, rather astonished at the unusual solemnity of the salutation. 'I hope you will enjoy your drive, and come back all the better for it.'

But Margarita never came back.

The afternoon waned into evening, and the evening became chilly and dark, and the inhabitants of Maple Farm were beginning to wonder if she had stayed anywhere for the night, when Mr Redstone, a neighbouring farmer, came in, looking very red and perturbed, and with a sealed letter in his hand.

'What is it, Redstone? They haven't been upset, have they?' cried old West, anxiously.

'Bless, you, no! nothing of the sort. Only when my Sam had driven 'em over to Taunton Miss Hay must needs make him take her first to the King's Head, to pick up a box, and then to the railway station, where she went off by train with the child.'

'Went off! where to?'

'London, I suppose! but, bless you, *I* don't know, and Sam, you see, was holding the horse. He oughtn't to have let them go, perhaps, but he's only a lad, and Miss Hay was very imperative

with him. So he came back to tell me, and bring this note for you.'

'Give it me,' said Mr West, eagerly, as he reached out his hands for the letter.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARGARITA LEAVES MAPLE FARM.

THE old farmer's hands trembled so that he could hardly break the seal.

'She's gone back to that fellow Fane,' said George, with an oath.

'I—I don't think so, George. I think she would kill herself sooner. And she was very unhappy, poor girl, and——'

'Nonsense, father. Don't frighten yourself like that. Let me read the note to you.'

'Perhaps I had better go, neighbour,' said Farmer Redstone.

'No, no! there are no secrets here, depend upon it. But I can't see the words. Read it out, George, and let me know the worst at once.'

'DEAR UNCLE,—The hardest pain I feel in leaving Maple Farm is the thought that I am breaking my promise to you, but do believe that at the time I meant what I said. It would have been my best comfort to think that I was still of some use in the world, and that somebody depended on me for pleasure and assistance. But it is impossible. I have been assailed by temptations whilst staying with you that I have found most difficult to resist, and I fear my own weakness too much to risk a renewal of them. So I am going to leave my child with her father, and then I shall go away and hide myself until he has changed his mind or come to regard things in a proper light. I love him too much to see him dragged down by the weight of his own weakness or mine. Forgive me, dear uncle, for leaving you so suddenly. Had I told you all this, I might not have had the strength to go. Do not be unhappy about me. I have survived the worst ill that earth could give me. I shall survive this

also. And remember that I do it—after the love of God—for the love of my sweet sister Daisy.—

Your affectionate MARGARITA.'

There was a dead silence when George had finished reading this letter. Old West was the first to break it.

'May God bless her,' he said solemnly, 'wherever she goes.'

'She shows a fine spirit, sir,' said Mr Redstone, approvingly.

'She has shown an angel's spirit ever since she has had one,' replied the old farmer. 'No one can tell what that girl has been to us, Redstone. I loved her better than my own daughter. Heaven forgive me! And now I have lost them both!'

'Don't talk in that fashion, father,' remonstrated George. 'Rita will come back to us some day or other, never fear.'

'And, meanwhile, you have George and me,' quoth his plump daughter-in-law, as she wound

her arms about his neck. The old man disengaged himself gently from her embrace.

'Thank you, my dear,' he said with a sigh.

It is hard in this world when we are longing for *salmis* and truffles to be obliged to put up with roast mutton and onion sauce. But it is so often necessary to do so that it is as well when we know how to make the best of a bad job. We are put off with substitutes at every turn of our journey. The great glory of heaven must be that there can be no substitution in the matter of the affections. Love, there, means affinity of spirit, and affinity is necessary to the coalition of souls. No Carrie will embrace us above as a makeshift for our Margarita. Her special affinity will have shot her off in the opposite direction. At least, let us hope so.

* * * * *

Dr Bellew had called several times to see Laurence Fane without effect. At last he wrote

a note desiring him to make an appointment.

'I have something of importance to communicate to you,' he said in that letter, 'and the sooner you hear it, the better.' Accordingly, on the following day he found himself in the presence of his correspondent.

'I conclude your business with me relates to Mrs Fane,' commenced Laurence. (He never called poor Daisy his wife.)

'It does. But you are not looking at all well yourself, Fane. I am afraid you have been working too hard.'

'On the contrary, I have been leading the most idle, rattling life possible. I am never at home.'

'It is beginning to tell on you. You look ten years older since I saw you last. By the way, I have to congratulate you.'

'On what?'

'Your accession to a large fortune. Believe

me, I was sincerely glad to hear it. No one deserves it better.'

'Thanks. It is a pity I have not a few bedridden fathers and mothers to support with it though. I am rather in the condition of the rooster who found a pearl upon his dunghill. But what is this about Mrs Fane? She is not worse, I hope.'

'On the contrary. I think there is a chance of her becoming better.'

Fane started.

'You don't mean to say she may recover her senses?'

'Calmly, my dear sir! No! I did not intend to intimate anything of the kind. Only I have been watching Mrs Fane's health very attentively during the last few weeks, and I feel convinced it would be much benefited by a removal to the country.'

'Yes,' replied Laurence, relapsing into indifference.

'Mrs Fane has no normal disease,' continued the doctor, 'but she is very delicate. She wants fresh air and plenty of out-door exercise. She should have access to a good garden, and be allowed to run about as she liked. She should be treated, in fact, as we treat a sickly child. And nowhere can this be done but in the country.'

'You think, then, I had better send her away?'

'I am sure of it.'

'But where shall I send her?'

'I have a friend—the widow of a medical man, who would take the charge of her, and whose residence is not so far from town but that I could continue my periodical visits to Mrs Fane. Mrs Owen lives in a healthy village near Sevenoaks, where my patient could have every luxury peculiar to the country, and where I will ensure her the greatest attention and most tender care.'

'Very good. I wish you would make the necessary arrangements for me, Bellew. I shall

be glad to think the poor child is enjoying herself after her way. I suppose Mrs Honeywood will go with her?'

'That is the only proviso Mrs Owen makes, that the choice of the personal attendant is left to herself. I think she finds her own servants are more amenable to discipline than those in the pay of others.'

'But she will be sure to entrust Mrs Fane to no one who will not be—*very tender*—with her, Bellew!' exclaimed Laurence anxiously.

'My dear fellow, as if I would permit it! I shall watch her as carefully there as I do here. And Mrs Owen is an old and most intimate friend of mine, who already takes the greatest interest in the case.'

'Thank you. Forgive me for the doubt. But she is so much alone, poor child, and there is no one but myself to think or act for her.'

'It was very natural. And to tell you the truth, Fane, I think this change is necessary, not

for your wife, but yourself. The strain of knowing she is so near to, and yet so distant from you, is becoming too much for your own health. You are looking more broken down than I have ever seen you.'

'It is not that only,' replied his companion in a husky voice. 'It is the other. You know.'

'I can guess—and have felt for you more than I can express. But, my dear friend, take courage. This struggle will not go on for ever. One or other will assuredly be restored to you.'

'But will you believe me when I say that had I the choice given me this moment, Bellew, of whether that poor girl up-stairs should recover the use of her reason, or be taken from us altogether, I could not say which it should be. To have her restored to me as she was, loving, tender, affectionate,—as she was when I thought there was no woman in the world like her,—seemed at one time as if it would be the very height of human happiness. But then I think of my other

darling who never offended me by word or deed, who has lived for me and with me for so many years, who is breaking her heart and my own at this very moment, and I don't know what I should say. *I really don't know what I should say!*'

'Yours is a very peculiar and unhappy position,' said Dr Bellew.

'It is the most miserable position in the world, doctor. There never was another man so circumstanced before. It is killing me by inches.'

'Well, look here, my dear fellow! Let us end one part of this unhappy drama at once. Give me authority to place Mrs Fane under Mrs Owen's care. You will then at least be freed from the misery of a personal knowledge of her condition, and at liberty to make what plans you choose to divert your own mind.'

'I put her entirely in your hands, Bellew. Do what is best for all of us. I conclude wherever she may be that I shall have access to her when-

ever I choose, and receive the most minute details of any change in her condition?'

'Of course! Well, that business is settled; may I ask what you are going to do with yourself?'

'No! don't ask! for I cannot answer the question. I am utterly indifferent as to what becomes of me.'

'Why not go abroad? To Paris, Spain, Algiers?'

'What should I do there without my——. I mean I am no longer a boy to be amused by strange sights.'

'But you must do something. And the necessity for work is, I suppose, past.'

'It is greater than ever, Bellew! If I do not work I shall go mad.'

'Well, I should be glad to hear you were out of England.'

'You may do so. I applied for the post of newspaper correspondent for Spain, only yesterday.'

'That is a nasty undertaking in these times. What need to jeopardize your life?'

'Because it is worth nothing to me,' he replied, passionately, 'without—— Oh, Bellew! can't you understand—without my wife and child.'

* * * * *

Margarita felt she must have *some* confidante in the undertaking she was bent upon—that of restoring her child to its father—and strange to say, Dr Bellew was the friend she finally decided to take into her confidence. She had thought at first of Miss Folkes, but then Miss Folkes, good and tender-hearted soul as she was, was but a woman—and as reliable depositories of a secret, Margarita had not much faith in her own sex. Doctors, who rank next door to priests for inviolability, generally combine in themselves the two great requisites for a confidante,—sympathy and silence. A chattering medical man is an anomaly (or ought to be one), and an unsympathetic medical man is something which may exist, but has

never come under the cognisance of the writer, nor had done under that of Margarita. So she went the next morning with the greatest confidence to Dr Bellew's house, her only fear being that his servant, or some of the poor whom he attended at that hour, gratis, should recognize her. But she covered her face with a thick veil and disguised her voice by a whisper, and found herself shown into the good doctor's consulting room as though she had been an utter stranger. There she discovered herself to him, and met with all the sympathy she had hoped for, and a great deal of good advice beside. He quite approved of her plan of leaving the child with its father, and relating the substance of the interview that had taken place between them the day before, averred his belief that the presence of little Daisy would prove of inestimable value to Laurence Fane's morbid state of mind. It would give him something to think and act for: it would make him feel that the duties of life were not completely over.

'And what are your plans with regard to yourself, my dear?' was the doctor's next question, the same he put to Laurence the day before.

'Oh, doctor! I must do what I can, but I have one great longing left, and if you can ever gratify *it*, I implore you to do so.'

'And what is that?'

'If he ever sends my poor darling from him to be taken care of by others, *let me have her*, Dr Bellew!'

CHAPTER XIV.

LITTLE COUSIN RITA.

'WHY, God bless my soul!' cried the doctor, slapping his knee, 'that's the very thing we have just agreed upon?'

'That Daisy should be sent to strangers?'

'Yes, but it was not Fane's proposal, my dear. It was mine. She has unfortunately taken a dislike to him, and her continual presence is telling visibly upon his spirits. Besides, the poor girl wants country air. Mr Fane consented to my placing her under the charge of a friend of mine only yesterday.'

'Oh! to whom is she going?'

'To a Mrs Owen, near Sevenoaks.'

'And will she take me too, Dr Bellew? I

will be Daisy's servant, her nurse. I will attend upon her night and day. I will ask for no assistance if they will only let me try what I can do to make her sad life brighter to her.'

'Are you sure you could stand the sight?'

'Of my own cousin! my more than sister? Dr Bellew, of what are you thinking?'

'Do you remember who she is?'

'How could I forget?'

'My dear! we are playing at cross purposes; I mean, will not the remembrance that you are attending on *Mr Fane's wife* occur at times to mar your noble purpose?'

'Shall I not, in fact, ignore all the affection Daisy and I have borne each other for years past, forget the love and gratitude I gave her, and draw back from my self-imposed duty, because she was the wife of Laurence before I was? Oh, Dr Bellew! you do not know, you cannot comprehend. Why, he married me only because I loved

her so dearly that it broke my heart to see his broken for her loss.'

'Forgive me, my dear, because my soul has not the power to follow the height yours has attained.'

'You did not know our Daisy when she was so sweet and so playful that we had but one jealousy between us, which should love her most. And she was so fond of me, my darling. She clung to me so closely, she would hardly leave my arms even for his.'

'You loved her better than—as I understand —than you do him.'

Margarita flushed deep crimson as she answered the doctor's remark.

'No, don't mistake me! There is nothing in the world I love so much as him.'

'You could make him very happy if you would go back to him.'

The tears started readily to her eyes.

'He thinks so now. He might think so perhaps for a few weeks—or months, or years; but the day would come, sooner or later—when Laurence would view such a step on my part in its true light. He would see it was selfishness and not love that had prompted me, and I should reap the reward of those who see the right way and refuse to walk in it. Oh, Dr Bellew! you do not know the struggle I have already gone through against myself. Don't join with him to make it harder.'

'My dear girl! not for the world! I admire the nobility of your spirit, and should not dare to taint it if I could. Mrs Fane is to be removed to Mrs Owen's care to-morrow. What time do you intend to leave the child with him? It is better I should not meet you there.'

'I will take her round this evening, after dark. Carson will receive her even if Laurence is not at home; and I shall leave the hotel at which we are staying to-night and go to another,

for fear of being traced. And to-morrow——'

'To-morrow I will be here to speak to you at the same hour, and tell you on what I have decided.'

* * * * *

That evening Laurence Fane dined at home. Although he was relieved, on the whole, to think that the responsibility of looking after poor Daisy was so soon to be taken off his hands, he felt that he should like to see her once again—to try if by chance he might make some impression on her wandering mind. As soon, therefore, as he had entered the drawing-room he gave orders that Mrs Honeywood should bring her patient downstairs, and soon the wasted little figure was seated on the sofa opposite to him, looking wistfully at the door, behind which her nurse had disappeared.

'Daisy, my darling!' he said, from his end of the room (he did not dare rise for fear of startling her); 'here is a bunch of violets for

you. Come and take the flowers. Smell how sweet they are.'

Still Daisy kept her eyes fixed in the direction of the door.

'They are almost as fine as those we used to gather at Maple Farm, Daisy.'

At the sound of that name she turned her head slowly towards him.

'*Rita!*' she said, solemnly.

It was the second time he had heard Margarita's name from those pale lips, but the mention of it startled him almost as much as if the dead had spoken.

'Yes. Rita used to pick bunches of violets for us,' he said, taking advantage of the occasion, 'dear Rita. We loved her dearly. Didn't we, Daisy?'

She left her seat and came towards him with a scared look on her face.

'Did you know Rita?' she whispered.

'I knew her well, Daisy. She was your dear

cousin and sister, and she loved me for your sake.'

'Did she love you? But I loved Laury, who fled away from me. If you were a man you would catch him. But you can do nothing—nothing,' she repeated, in a voice of supreme contempt.

At that moment there came a sharp pull at the bell and a double knock.

'Carson!' called Fane from the open door. 'If that's Dr Bellew or Mr Reeves, let him in; but I cannot see any one else to-night.'

'Very good, sir.'

Carson went to the door. Fane retreated to the drawing-room, but there appeared such a commotion in the hall, and such a lengthy colloquy ensued, that his curiosity was aroused, and he again thrust his head into the hall.

'What is it, Carson?'

'Well, sir, I don't know what you'll say. She's quite alone, and I don't see any one in sight —but it's Miss Daisy, sir.'

'Papa! papa!' screamed the child, as she caught sight of her father's face, and rushed into his arms.

'My baby! my darling! my Daisy!' he said, as he strained her to his heart. But the moment after he thought of Margarita—Margarita must have brought her there—Margarita would never have parted with her child!

'Where is Mrs Fane?' he panted. 'Some one must have left Miss Daisy here. She must be outside. Take the child, Carson, and let me go.'

In a minute he was in the open air, rushing bareheaded up and down the street. But in the long line of terrace houses he could not see a figure. From end to end it was silent and apparently deserted. 'She must be hiding,' was his next thought. But neither was this successful. Nowhere about the hall steps or area was there the vestige of a human creature.

'How did you find her?' he demanded

breathlessly of Carson, alluding to the child.

'Well, sir, it was just the knock and ring that you heard. Some one must have done that for little Missy, and if you hadn't stopped me to take the order, I should have caught 'em maybe. But when I opened the door there was no one but Miss Daisy on the step. And all she says was, "I want my papa, Carson."'

'Dear child,' cried Laurence, catching her up again, 'where's mamma, my pet? Why didn't mamma come with Daisy?'

'Mamma *did* come,' said the little chatterbox, 'and she gave me lollies not to cry—and I didn't cry, papa. And then mamma rang the bell and told me to ask Carson to take me to papa. And I like this home better than the farm, papa. And I want Ellen and my little dog, and the blue doll I kept up in the nursery cupboard.'

'You may go, Carson,' said his master, as he dismissed the wondering domestic and carried the child into the drawing-room. 'My little love,

where is your dear mamma? Tell papa all about it, Daisy. Tell him where mamma has gone to.'

'Take off my cloak and my gloves,' replied the little woman, as she attempted to disencumber herself of her walking things. 'Who is that lady? Is she your nurse, papa?'

At this, poor Daisy, who had been staring at the new comer with unmitigated astonishment, rose and walked across to the sofa whereon sat the father with his child.

'Little cousin Rita,' she said in an awed voice. 'Is it little cousin Rita?' And then, as though she had discovered something, she clapped her hands with joy, and exclaimed, 'Oh, yes! it is Rita come back to play with me. Rita, how long you have been away—the puppies' eyes are open, and the speckled hen has hatched all her eggs, and the cherry-blossoms have fallen to the ground since you have been gone. But now that you have come back we will have such games together —such glorious games in the old orchard and the

kitchen garden. You will never go away again, Rita, will you? Say you will never go away again.'

'What does the lady want, papa? Why does she laugh at me and stroke my hand?'

'She wants to love you, baby, and be kind to you. Don't be afraid, my darling, she would not hurt you, would you, dear?' he said, addressing the mad girl, who was looking with feverish delight into the little one's face.

'Hurt my Rita! of course not. Why should I?' returned Daisy; and as the fair wasted head crowned with its faded hair bent down to kiss the child, Laurence put his lips down also and embraced them both together.

'But where is mamma?' he repeated, despairingly, as he tried to turn the little Daisy's attention once more into the channel which interested himself. For his first idea on seeing his child had been that she was but the forerunner of his wife's advent, and that Margarita had sent her in

advance to tell him the joyful news that she had relented of her determination and meant to make him happy.

'Mamma put a letter in my pocket,' replied Miss Daisy.

Laurence secured and dragged it forth. It was very short, but as he perused, he felt that against it there could be no appeal.

'DEAREST LAURENCE,—Did you think that where your love had failed, your money would succeed? I will not take it from you, but neither will I deprive your child of her rights, nor you of her. I leave you therefore Daisy. I do not say "love her," because I know it is unnecessary; but I do say, "Try to be content with what God has given you, and forget all that is unlawful or against His will." You have driven me from you, Laurence, but till my life's end I shall never cease to pray for your welfare and that of our child.—MARGARITA.'

He sat with the letter in his hand, gazing at it through eyes that were blinded with his tears.

'Don't cry, papa!' said little Daisy presently.

He looked up. The two creatures—one as helpless as the other—were gazing at him as children gaze at a sorrow they cannot comprehend.

They recalled him to himself. He rose and rang the bell.

'Send Mrs Honeywood here!' he said to Carson. 'Mrs Honeywood,' he continued, when that worthy appeared, 'my little girl has come to stay awhile with me. Do you think you could take charge of her for the night?'

'And that's your little girl, sir. Lor' bless me! What a pretty creetur! And ain't she like my poor lady here too! Of course I'll take care of her, and good care too. And where's her things, sir?'

'Mamma said my things were left at the farm,' quoth Daisy, 'and papa would send for them.'

'I'll see about all that to-morrow, if you can

manage without them to-night,' said Laurence, with the ghastly smile with which one attempts to set inexplicable occurrences right in the sight of one's domestics.

'Very good, sir! I'll do my best. And will you come to bed now, Missy? It's past eight o'clock.'

'You had better go, my pet! you're sleepy,' said the father, 'and Mrs Honeywood will give you some nice bread and milk.'

The little one held out her arms to the nurse, who was about to carry her from the room, when her own charge rose too.

'Not without me,' she ejaculated, hurriedly. 'Let me go too. Rita will cry without cousin Daisy.'

'What so soon, my dear,' said Honeywood. 'Hadn't you best stay and talk a bit to your good gentleman?'

'No, no! I must go with Rita,' replied

Daisy, as she clung about the form of Margarita's little child.

'Let them go together,' said Laurence, as he watched the tenacity of Daisy's hold. 'It may amuse Mrs Fane. Only be very careful, nurse, that—that—she does not hurt my little one.'

'Bless you, sir, she wouldn't hurt a fly, poor dear. Come along then, my pretties,' continued Honeywood, as she drew both her charges from the room.

Laurence sunk back upon the sofa, and with a groan re-opened the note he still held crushed between his fingers. This was what it had come to then! He had deprived the woman he loved most in the world of her best solace, and driven her from the only refuge her wounded spirit had discovered!

CHAPTER XV.

AT ROSE BANK.

MRS OWEN was the widow of an old college friend, and cousin of Dr Bellew. She lived in a pretty country villa, near Sevenoaks, and when, after her husband's death, she informed the doctor of her desire to take charge of some lady or child who was mentally afflicted, he thought no one could be better fitted for such a responsibility. For Mrs Owen, although she had been married some years, was still, comparatively speaking, a young woman; she was also childless, and of a singularly sweet and placid temperament, blended with great firmness. She had already had the charge of two of Dr Bellew's patients, one a lady who had subsequently been restored to

health, and the other a poor little deformed and idiot boy, whose parents had lately left the country, taking their child with them, and leaving Mrs Owen at liberty to fill up his place with another patient, for she made a rule never to take more than one at a time.

This was the lady to whom Dr Bellew had persuaded Laurence Fane to commit the care of his wife.

It would be difficult to find a place more suitable than Rose Bank (as Mrs Owen's house was called) for the purpose to which it had been dedicated. The pretty Italian villa, with its light trellis-work verandah, green jalousies and creeper-covered walls, looked as unlike a prison as well might be; whilst the ample garden, which sheltered it from the road, and was over-run by rose-trees, and besprinkled with bright patches of colour here and there, appeared the very abode of cheerfulness.

A few mornings after Laurence Fane had

authorized Dr Bellew to do what he thought best with his afflicted wife, Mrs Owen was sitting at her writing-desk by the open window, looking with rather perplexed countenance at a letter of the doctor's, which she held in her hand. The weather was now warm and sunny. The spring flowers were beginning to wither on their stalks—the lilac and laburnum blossoms to turn brown—and the roses to show signs of a glorious summer harvest. As Mrs Owen sat considering the communication she had received, the balmy May air stirred the strings of the widow's cap she still wore, and rustled the papers on her table. A kitten took advantage of the slight commotion to spring upon a tradesman's bill that had fluttered to the ground, and turn head over heels, embracing it as she went, and a blackbird in a wicker cage, outside the window, set up a loud anthem of delight. Still Mrs Owen took no notice of either the one or the other, but rising slowly rang the bell, and as slowly sat down again.

'Send Hayward here,' she said, when a maid-servant had answered it.

Hayward was an old servant and confidante, who had lived with Mrs Owen ever since the commencement of her married life, who had nursed her only child until its death, who had known and shared all her pleasures and troubles, and without whom, she often said, she would have no heart to undertake the responsibilities she did.

'Hayward! I cannot understand this letter from my cousin Bellew,' said her mistress, as soon as the old woman appeared.

'Indeed! ma'am,' replied Hayward, as she dropped into the chair nearest the door.

'It is incomprehensible! He wants me to take the charge of a Mrs Fane. Quite a young person it appears—and of whose recovery he seems to entertain some hope—but he proposes to send down an attendant with her, or rather to send an attendant down to receive her on arrival.'

'That is altogether against your rules, ma'am.'

'Completely, and Dr Bellew is so well aware of it. That is what astonishes me. He knows that since we had that terrible scene with Miss Conway's nurse, I have made it a point to choose the attendants for my patients myself. And he so entirely approved of poor little Charles's nurse. There could not be a better woman, and I had almost promised her the next work we had to do.'

'Perhaps the person Dr Bellew recommends has been a long time with the lady?'

'On the contrary, I should imagine they had never met. Mrs Fane is a lady of high position —one of my cousin Bellew's patients, who has lost her mind from an accident—he does not mention how—and requires country air. He says she is quite young, very pretty, and gentle, and that I shall take the greatest interest in her. But he adds that he particularly desires that she shall have

as personal attendant another young woman, also well known to him, whom he believes to possess all the necessary qualifications for the situation.'

'Also a lady?' said Hayward, quickly.

'Oh, no! I should imagine not; he says nothing about it,' replied Mrs Owen, turning over the letter. 'And I *hope* not, Hayward! Nothing could be more unpleasant than to have a gentlewoman in such a position.'

'So I should think, ma'am,' said the servant, drily.

'What do you advise me to do, Hayward?'

'What do you *wish* to do, ma'am?'

'I should like to undertake the charge of Mrs Fane, but I don't want the servant.'

'And the doctor won't send us one without the other.'

'He doesn't go quite so far as to say that, but he insinuates as much.'

'You'd have to engage an attendant any way, ma'am.'

'Of course. I intended to have offered the situation to Mrs Prosser.'

'Well, ma'am, you can trust Dr Bellew to choose the patient for you, so I think you might trust him to choose the servant. That's my advice,' said Hayward, as she rose to go.

'I believe you're right, Hayward. Only it's such a different thing, you know. The patient is placed under her control, but the attendant thinks, in virtue of her office, she may queen it over every one.'

'Then take her on trial, ma'am. Don't commit yourself to more than that.'

'So I will, Hayward. I will write and tell cousin Bellew that it must depend entirely on the young woman's own behaviour whether I keep her or not.'

Still, Mrs Owen was not completely satisfied, as her letter to the doctor plainly intimated.

'I am very willing to accept the care of Mrs Fane,' she wrote, 'but I do not like the idea of

your choosing her attendant. If you do, it must be on the understanding that I am not to keep her unless I *thoroughly like her.*'

Dr Bellew's answer was decided.

'I shall travel down with Mrs Fane to Sevenoaks on Friday. The young woman whom I have engaged as her attendant—Mary Hill by name—will be with you to-morrow evening. I agree to your condition concerning her. If you don't like her, send her back. But you will like her *very much indeed.*'

'He seems very positive about it,' said Mrs Owen, as she showed the letter to her confidante.

'Ah, ma'am, gentlemen's likes are not always ladies' likes, and the doctor may see with different eyes to yours. However, it is no use speculating about the young woman before she arrives. You'll be able to judge for yourself before long.'

'Yes! she will be here this evening. I am going to drink tea with the Rogers to-night, Hayward, but you must send Jane down to meet her

at the station, and make her as comfortable as you can till I return. It is thoughtful, after all, of the doctor to send her down first. I can initiate her into some of my little ways before Mrs Fane arrives.'

Mrs Owen spent the evening with her friends, and at nine o'clock Jane appeared with a lantern to light her home through the dusky lanes. As soon as she had removed her walking things and entered her sitting-room she rang for Hayward.

'Well, Hayward, Jane tells me the young woman has arrived.'

'Oh yes, ma'am, she's arrived, right enough.'

'And what do you make of her?'

Hayward closed the door carefully behind her and advanced to her mistress's side.

'Well, ma'am, I hope you won't be startled, but——she's quite a lady!'

'Quite a lady! Nonsense! You must be mistaken.'

'I don't see why I should, ma'am,' replied the

old woman, in a tone of affront. 'I've seen plenty of ladies in my time, and I *ought* to know one if I don't.'

'What do you go by?'

'By her voice, and her manner, and everything.'

'How very annoying. What can cousin Bellew have been thinking of? Now, I shall have all the trouble of sending her back again. Where is she?'

'In my room, ma'am. We've been taking our tea together. She's as quiet as quiet can be, but very pleasant spoken when she *do* speak.'

'Ask her to step here. I had better speak to her at once, and find out whether she really understands what she has undertaken to do.'

Hayward withdrew to execute the order, whilst her mistress stood at the table with knitted brows.

'So provoking,' she thought to herself. 'Cousin Bellew ought to have known better. How can I

expect a gentlewoman to perform all the menial offices that will be required of her? She will want some one, in all probability, to wait on her. Men have really no consideration whatever!'

'Good evening, madam!' said a soft voice at the door.

Mrs Owen started, and looked up. A young woman dressed all in black, with the sweetest and fairest of faces, and smooth brown hair brushed off her ears and wound in the most puritanical of coils at the back of the head, stood before her.

'Are you—Mary Hill?' she stammered.

'I am the nurse Dr Bellew sent down to attend upon Mrs Laurence Fane, madam.'

'Indeed. You look very young for such an office.'

'I am not young,' said the stranger bitterly. 'At least I have had much experience.'

'Are you married?'

'No!' in a stern hard voice that made Mrs Owen scrutinize her narrowly.

'And have you ever nursed any one in the condition of Mrs Fane before?'

'No! madam! but—but I have seen them, and I have nursed children, and Dr Bellew is quite satisfied that I am fit to undertake the charge.'

'You understand, I suppose, that you will be completely under me?'

'Yes, I understand that!'

'And that you will have to be in constant attendance on Mrs Fane by day and night. You will have to sleep with her!'

'Oh, I am so glad,' said the woman, quickly.

'Do you know the lady, then?'

Mary Hill hesitated a moment—then she replied:

'Yes, madam! I knew her years ago, before she was married—down in the country, where I was brought up.'

'How strange that Dr Bellew should not mention it to me.'

'Perhaps he did not consider it of any consequence. And I think, perhaps——'

'Pray tell me what you think. You must have no secrets from me.'

'I think, madam, that—as I also knew Mr Fane many years ago—Dr Bellew may have thought it better *he* should not know that it is *I* who am in attendance on his wife.'

'But this is extraordinary,' cried Mrs Owen. 'What possible reason could there be——?'

'It might revive unpleasant recollections of the time when Dai——, when Mrs Fane was well and happy; and, indeed, madam,' went on Mary Hill rapidly, 'I hope if Mr Fane should ever write or speak to you on the subject, that you will not drop a hint of what I have told you, for I know it is Dr Bellew's express wish that he should hear nothing of the place I came from.'

'Mr Fane is not at all likely to question me

on such a matter,' replied Mrs Owen coldly; 'all the arrangements about his wife having been made through Dr Bellew. But I must say I cannot understand why there should be any caution used about so simple a business.'

'He might not think me sufficiently experienced,' faltered the nurse.

'*That* is for *me* to decide, Mary Hill.'

'Oh, madam! do not be angry with me. Perhaps I have explained myself badly, but indeed you will find me faithful to the duties I have undertaken.'

'I do not wish to doubt it. Has Hayward shown you your room yet?'

'No. She waited to receive your orders.'

'If you will come with me, I will show it to you now.' And Mary Hill followed her new mistress silently from the room.

Their way led by a cheerful staircase to an upper landing, which was occupied by four rooms. The first they entered, which was hung with pic-

tures, and furnished with a bright chintz of red and green and white, was designed for Daisy's use, and opened into a smaller plainer room intended for her nurse. On the opposite side of the landing, on which stood a stand of flowering plants, was a cheerful sitting-room, in which the patient was to take her meals, and at the back of which was situated Mrs Owen's bed-chamber, which communicated again with that of Mary Hill.

'These rooms have been expressly planned with a view to the comfort of my patients and their attendants,' said Mrs Owen. 'You see how conveniently they open into one another. If ever you are alarmed or require assistance, either by day or night, you have but to touch these bells. One rings at my bed head, the other in my study. You will, of course, have a great deal to do in the way of dressing, washing, and amusing Mrs Fane, but you will never need to leave her for a moment, and you will be under strict orders not to do so. Everything you require will be brought to

you on demand, and your meals will be served with hers in the sitting-room opposite. Your duties so far will be very simple.'

'I shall try to fulfil them, madam.'

'I dare say you will; but there is another and more difficult task to perform in the management of patients of weak mind, and that is the art of knowing how to soothe without too much indulging them. As you appear to be quite inexperienced in the particular kind of nursing you have now undertaken, I must tell you that it will chiefly depend on your efficiency in this line whether you remain with Mrs Fane or no. I know nothing about her, but some of my patients have been very mischievous. The little boy who has just left me used to tear up everything with his teeth. He required constant watching. I cannot have my property destroyed.'

'She shall not do it, madam. I am sure I shall be able to persuade her to be good and gentle,' replied Mary Hill, earnestly.

'I think you have a greater interest in this poor lady than you wish me to know,' said Mrs Owen, as she turned her penetrating eyes, but not unkindly, upon the young woman.

'Oh, madam! I know her—I knew her long ago, and you will see for yourself how sweet and good and gentle she is,' said Mary Hill, with crimson cheeks and her eyes bent upon the ground.

'This is *my* bedroom,' said her mistress, without further remark.

It was a very pretty room, profusely ornamented with religious objects and photographs, and such possessions of Mrs Owen's as she considered too sacred to be placed in the more public apartments. Over the mantel-shelf hung a painting of the late doctor—a fine-looking man, with a grave, kindly expression of countenance. By the bedside was a water-colour drawing of a child, a little girl about the age of Laurence Fane's daughter, with the same coloured hair and eyes.

Mary Hill stopped before this portrait and regarded it attentively.

'That is a picture of my lost darling,' said Mrs Owen, observing the action, 'taken a few weeks before her death. I never had but one child. It seemed hard to lose her so soon.'

'Oh, it was hard—it was bitterly hard,' replied the new comer, earnestly.

Mrs Owen stared at the emphasis with which her words were delivered.

'I do not think that any one but a mother can know what a mother feels,' she answered gently.

'I am *sure* of it,' replied Mary Hill, and as she turned to follow her mistress out of the room, Mrs Owen saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARY HILL.

'THERE is some mystery attached to this nurse of cousin Bellew's,' thought Mrs Owen, as she was sitting by herself the following day and waiting the arrival of the doctor and his patient. 'She is a gentlewoman, there is no doubt of that, and she has known trouble—or I am much mistaken. But why should her eyes have filled with tears over the portrait of my poor little Nelly? and what is the secret of her connection with Mrs Fane? How carefully she has arranged everything for her reception. No mother could be more tender in providing for the necessities of a sick child. And when I told her not to tire herself, she replied that

work was a necessity to her, and that she must be moving about, or—I think she was going to say she should go mad—but she caught herself up in time and did not finish the sentence. It is all very inexplicable, and I do not think cousin Bellew has treated me fairly in keeping me in the dark—still, he is right in one thing—I do like her, even in this short space of time, *very much indeed.*'

Here her reverie was interrupted by the very person of whom she was thinking.

'Madam!' she exclaimed breathlessly, 'the carriage you sent to the station to meet them is coming back. I saw it turn the corner of the road.'

Mrs Owen looked up at the flushed face and the large lustrous eyes with increased amazement.

'Well! there is no need to be flurried, Mary. You will never make a good nurse if you permit yourself to become so excited.'

Mary Hill looked confused.

'I am so sorry,' she stammered, apologetically, 'but—they are here, madam—the carriage has stopped at the door,' and the new attendant leaned against the parlour wall with her hand pressed against her heart.

'I will receive them!' said Mrs Owen kindly, as she walked past her into the hall. Dr Bellew had already descended—so had Mrs Honeywood, who had accompanied him to take care of Daisy on the journey—and together they were trying to induce their wilful charge to leave the carriage. But she held fast to the seat and refused to quit her stronghold.

'Go away,' she kept on repeating in her childish voice, 'this is my own little room, and I won't come out of it. Here is my bed, and there is the table for my dinner, and the baby shall sleep underneath, and so we will go on—on—on, and the monster shall never catch us. Fly away home, fly away home!' she continued to the driver, who was longing to laugh, but dared not. 'Your

house is on fire, your children are gone. No, no, it was not fire, but water,' she added, correcting herself, 'and it made me shiver. It makes me shiver still.'

'Now, come along, there's a sweet dear,' cried Mrs Honeywood, 'and her old nursey shall get her some nice tea and bread and butter.'

'But, my dear Mrs Fane——' commenced Dr Bellew, putting his face in at the carriage door. A smart slap soon made him draw it out again.

'You've got your answer, sir,' remarked the driver, unable to contain himself longer.

'We must lift her out, doctor,' said Honeywood, decidedly. But as they attempted to do it, Daisy scratched their faces like a little cat.

'Poor dear,' cried Mrs Owen, compassionately. 'It will be kinder to muffle her hands at once, cousin. Hayward, fetch me the mufflers—they are in my chest of drawers,' she continued to the old woman who was standing by.

But the order seemed to strike on the heart of the new nurse like a sharp pain.

'Oh, let me try first,' she said, springing forward and laying her hand without ceremony on the arm of her mistress. 'Let me speak to her, madam. I am sure she will listen to me.'

'Just as you please,' replied Mrs Owen.

'Ah! Mrs—I mean Mary—and so here you are,' exclaimed Dr Bellew, as he instinctively doffed his hat, and then replaced it with an air of having betrayed himself. But neither the action nor the words escaped the notice of his cousin's widow.

'Daisy,' said Mary Hill, in so low a voice as to be inaudible to the bystanders. 'Daisy, my darling, don't you know me? Won't you come with me?'

The mad girl paused in her occupation of trying to pull the tassels off the carriage blinds, and regarded the speaker gravely.

'Look in my face, darling,' continued Mary

Hill. 'You know me, don't you? You remember your own Rita? Come with me, and let me love you as I did long ago.'

Daisy made no direct answer, but with her eyes fixed upon the features of the new nurse, gathered her skirts together and descended the carriage steps.

'How fixedly she regards you,' remarked Mrs Owen. 'She must recognize you, Mary Hill.'

'Do you know me?' demanded Mary, tearfully, as she threw her arm around the frail figure of Laurence Fane's wife.

'Yes,' replied Daisy, solemnly, with her eyes still rivetted on the other's countenance. 'I know you now, bright angel, though I did not at first. You are the blessed Virgin Mary.'

'No, no,' cried Rita, shrinking from her.

'No? Then you must be one of my guardian spirits? There were only two that bore your

look, and one I lost when his wings grew. But you remain.'

'Yes, I remain. I shall never fly away from you.'

'A happy notion,' said Dr Bellew, aside to Mrs Owen.

'There could not be a better. But let me see my patient comfortably disposed in her own rooms, and then I have a crow to pluck with you, cousin. Mary Hill, can you persuade Mrs Fane to go upstairs?'

'I can do that, ma'am, fast enough,' exclaimed Mrs Honeywood, not overpleased to see herself so soon supplanted. 'Come, my deary, come and have nice tea with old nurse.'

'Woman!' said Daisy, grandiloquently, 'how dare you touch me? Kneel to the guardian spirit!'

'Hush, hush! I am *your* guardian, not hers,' interposed Margarita, gently.

'Then let us mount together, but let the

woman grovel,' replied Daisy. 'Doctor! I shall never require any of your services again. This angel has been given charge over me from heaven.'

'Very good, Mrs Fane, mount to the sky as fast as ever you can (that's the way, up those stairs), and Honeywood and I will try and content ourselves with the lower regions.'

'Lor! to think of the poor dear,' said the discarded nurse.

'But may I show you the way?' demanded Mrs Owen.

'May she show us the way?' said Daisy to Rita.

'Yes! my child,' she whispered in reply.

'The spirit says you may,' repeated Daisy to the mistress of the house, as, clinging to her companion's arm, she toiled up the staircase.

'Is this heaven?' she continued, in an awed tone as she was led into the cheerful bedroom.

'If I could make it so to you, I would,' was the emphatic answer.

'I don't think I need stay with you,' observed Mrs Owen, as she turned suddenly and found her new patient warmly encircled by the arms of her attendant. 'Mrs Fane seems quite at home with you, so if you will remove her walking things, I will see about some refreshment being provided for her in the sitting-room. You are not at all nervous or afraid?' she added, looking into Mary Hill's face.

'Afraid!' exclaimed the nurse, gazing tenderly down into the sweet sad eyes that had never once been taken off her own. 'Afraid! What, my own darling, *of you?* Oh, pardon me, madam,' she went on rapidly, 'I ought not to have said that—it was very bold of me—but she is so young and fragile, and——'

'Never mind,' replied her mistress, firmly. 'It is of no consequence. Speak to her just as you like;' and then she ran down into the sitting-

room, closed the door hastily behind her, and came upon the good doctor like a clap of thunder:—

'Cousin! *who* and *what* is Mary Hill?'

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS OWEN IS PUZZLED.

'BLESS my heart and soul!' exclaimed the doctor, 'how you do frighten one! *What is Mary Hill?* Why! a woman I suppose—or so she has always led me to believe. I should have thought you might have guessed as much as that for yourself.'

'Cousin! don't be so foolish—you know what I mean as well as I do. *Who* is she? What connection is there between herself and Mrs Fane?'

Dr Bellew scratched his head. He was in a quandary.

'Why should there be any connection between them except that of sympathy? Mary Hill is a

good, kind-hearted young woman. Had I not been sure of that, I should not have recommended her to you.'

'But she is more than sympathetic or kind-hearted. She is eagerly and earnestly interested in the cause. Had she been Mrs Fane's sister she could not have received her with greater affection. There is some stronger link here than that of nurse and patient.'

'They have met before, I believe!'

'In the same position of life?'

'Bless me! what a question, when one is the wife of a man of position, and the other a servant!'

'But she neither speaks nor acts like a servant. She is a perfect gentlewoman, and I know there is some secret attached to her. Cousin Bellew, *do* tell me all about it.'

The doctor grew quite testy.

'There is nothing to tell. I send you down a servant and you approve of her. Well! be con-

tented and don't attempt to pry into what does not concern you to know. If Mary Hill does not do her duty, send her away. If she does, what more can you require? Really, poor Owen was right when he said he would rather be catechised by a college of surgeons than by one woman.'

'That is because we understand the art so well,' replied Mrs Owen. 'Well, all I can say is that it is very unsatisfactory and incomprehensible.'

She had not relinquished the idea, however, of having the information she thirsted for, out of him, and during the dinner that ensued she returned to the attack.

'How did Mr Fane bear his wife's removal?' she inquired abruptly.

'He was quite prepared for it, and I think it will prove a relief to him. He has his child, you know.'

'*His child!* I didn't understand there was a child. How old is it?'

'I really can't remember. Three or four, I think.'

'But I thought you said this poor thing had been out of her mind for six or seven years.'

The doctor found himself in another bungle, and he hardly knew how to get out of it this time.

'Somewhere thereabouts. But I have not known her so long, remember. I don't think the child *is* her own when I come to reflect on it. No! of course, how could it be?'

'But whose is it, then?'

'Belongs to Fane's sister, I believe, or brother, or something of that sort. An adopted child, you understand.'

'It is strange that so young a man as you describe Mr Fane to be should burden himself with somebody else's child. Is he very much attached to his wife?'

'Devotedly.'

'Then I suppose he will be coming here to see her occasionally. You must ask him to let me

know when to expect his visits, cousin Bellew.'

'To be sure. I never thought of that. By the way, Mrs Owen, if Fane *does* come down here (though I can't see for the life of me why he should)——'

'It is very natural.'

'But he can't do her any good, and she dislikes the sight of him. However, if he *should* come, contrive, like a good soul, that he does not encounter Mary Hill.'

'Now, what is the meaning of *this?*' exclaimed Mrs Owen, as she pushed away her plate and confronted the doctor.

'Simply because—well, to tell you the plain truth, there's a sort of disagreement between Mary Hill's people and the Fanes, and he might not like to meet her, and I'm sure she would not care to see him.'

'A disagreement between families of such different positions. Has Mary Hill misbehaved herself?'

'Good God! no,' cried the doctor, horrified beyond all description at finding he had drawn down such an imputation on the head of his favourite. 'She's the best creature in the world, only it will be just as well to keep her out of Fane's sight, and *they mustn't meet each other*, that's the plain English of it, cousin Owen.'

'Well, it is very incomprehensible,' sighed Mrs Owen for the fiftieth time at least since she had seen Mary Hill.

* * * * *

The next thing that occurred was that George West walked into Laurence Fane's room one morning as he was sitting at breakfast, and encountered little Daisy seated complacently on the floor, and admiring a long train of animals that she had just set up in marching order, on their way to Noah's ark.

'Good gracious! then she is *here!*' cried George as he caught sight of the child.

'Not Margarita!' replied Fane, guessing to

whom he alluded. 'George! where *can* she be? I shall go mad if I do not discover!'

'How did you come by the child then?'

'She left her here, with a most cruel letter to the effect that I had driven her away from Bushthorne, and if it was the child I wanted the child was mine. As if I ever cared one straw about the child in comparison with its mother.'

'But Rita is right, Laurence! The child *is* yours and she is not. And you have obtained no clue to her whereabouts?'

'Not the faintest. The hall bell was rung one evening, and when it was opened Daisy was found standing on the doorstep with the note pinned inside her cloak. I ran into the street at once, but I could discover no trace of Margarita. I hoped at first that she might return and loiter about the place in expectation of seeing the child, and set watchers to detain her; but she has never come. I think she has deserted me for good, now.'

'And my sister?'

'I have sent her into the country by the advice of her doctor,' replied Fane, raising himself. 'She was pining for fresh air and freedom. She is with a Mrs Owen, near Sevenoaks. I hear it is a lovely place. I was just thinking of running down to see her.'

'I should very much like to go with you. I came up to town simply to hear if you had received any tidings of Rita. She left us, as I wrote you word, without warning or the least hint by which we might find out her destination. But to sit down quietly without any knowledge of where she is or what she is doing is next to impossible.'

'She has behaved very cruelly to me,' repeated his friend in a tone of the deepest dejection. 'She knows my life is bound up in hers, and yet she can subject me to this terrible suspense. If it goes on much longer I shall begin to believe she has lost all love for me.'

'No, Fane; don't say that. Had you left her unmolested in the security of Maple Farm,

Rita would never have tried to hide herself from you. Come, now. Tell me what was the fresh outburst on your part that frightened her away from Bushthorne? For she had promised, only the day before, to remain with us and supply poor Daisy's place to my old father.'

'It was nothing that the generality of women would have been frightened at,' returned Laurence, with a sad smile. 'I had just come into a fortune of twenty thousand a year, and I settled it upon her child and herself.'

'You settled all that money upon Rita?'

'Unconditionally! What is it in comparison with the loss she has sustained through me? What money can repay her for all she has gone through?'

'None! Not even if it were fifty thousand instead of twenty thousand a year. And, therefore, it was an insult to offer it to her, Laurence.'

'An insult!'

'Yes! I repeat it—an insult! No wonder Rita

scorned it. No wonder she ran away, poor child, and hid herself from the man who thought to reimburse her with money for the damages she had sustained in her affections.'

'Don't talk like that, George, or we shall quarrel.'

'I don't want to quarrel with you, Fane; but, though you have lived with my cousin for six years, you do not know her as I do, or you would never have committed so gross an error. Rita would give her life for yours at any moment: I am sure of it. She would endure poverty, or sickness, or alienation, to do you good; but directly you sought to win her back to you on the strength of anything lower than her own sense of duty, you showed her your true estimate of her character, and put her on her metal to prove that she was alone dishonouring her profession and herself by being bought over to deny it.'

'Those are harsh words, George.'

'They are true words, Laurence.'

'Heaven is my witness that I meant no such thing as you insinuate. I wish I had cut off my right hand before I wrote the letter which drove Margarita from your protection; but as I live my only desire in settling that money on her was to place my darling for ever above the necessity of providing for herself.'

'Come, then. Let us shake hands and forget all about it. She will not accept your offer, so there is no harm done.'

'No HARM DONE! when Margarita may be wandering, God only knows where, without the means of procuring either food or shelter?'

'Your fears make you exaggerate, Fane. It is scarcely probable that a woman like Rita should be unable to provide herself with the common necessaries of life. I am sure she had sufficient money in hand for such a contingency, for we were talking of the possibility of her leaving us only a few days before the event.'

'But she must be dreadfully unhappy, without her child—or me.'

'That is another question. I dare say she is sad enough, poor girl; but now I know the secret of her departure I think I can help you, Fane.'

'How?' exclaimed the other, eagerly.

'I will wait a little while and then I will advertise for her. If I can get Rita to communicate with me I am sure I shall be able to explain matters so far as to persuade her to return to Maple Farm. But you will have to promise to leave her there unmolested.'

'I will promise anything, so I may but know that she is safe and well. This silence and suspense is torture to me. Oh, George! I never believed it possible a man could love a woman as I love Margarita. She is my life—my soul! I cannot live without her. For my speaking like this, I dare say you think me an awful fool!'

'I do not,' replied George West in a low voice.

'But if you only knew what her love has been for me—her devotion, her——'

'*Don't, Fane!*'

'Why, George, do you?' commenced his companion in surprise.

'Be quiet, Laurence! Don't say what you were going to say—only—don't you remember, old fellow, when you came to me years ago, and told me you wanted to marry my sister Daisy, and you called her Margarita, and I thought you meant my cousin.'

'Good Heavens! yes!' cried Fane as a light burst in upon him, and was followed by the remembrance of Daisy's own assertions, so obliterated from his mind by her sad death, and Margarita's subsequent arrival, 'and—and—you haven't forgotten her yet, George!'

'*Forgotten her,*' replied George West, in a tone of quiet incredulity. 'Is she a woman to be loved and to be *forgotten*, Fane? But don't speak on the subject again to me, please! Only you know

now, why I can understand everything you may say concerning her, and swear solemnly that she shall have a true friend and protector in me to her life's end.'

'God bless you, old chum!' said Laurence brokenly, as he grasped his hand. 'Your trouble puts mine to shame. And now, what shall we do? You say you want to see poor Daisy! Shall we go to Sevenoaks together? Only I wanted to take the child with me.'

'Why should that be an obstacle to my accompanying you? I bet I'm more used to children than you are.'

'Ah, so you ought to be, only brats *are* a nuisance to any but their rightful owners.'

'*This one is Margarita's,*' replied George West gravely, and neither said another word upon the subject.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VISITORS FOR MRS FANE.

MRS OWEN had particularly requested that she should have due notice when Mr Fane intended visiting his wife at Rose Bank.

Not that there was ever anything in the working of her little establishment that she was ashamed of, or wished to conceal—she was too sure of her own character and social position to be afraid that any one would imagine that—but her house was small, and her staff of servants limited, and in that secluded village it was not an easy matter to serve up a dinner at a moment's notice fit to set before such fastidious guests as gentlemen are generally disposed to be.

So that it was with no small concern that, as

Mrs Owen was busily engaged on that particular morning with some domestic matters in the upper regions, she heard the announcement of her little housemaid Jane, that 'there was two gentlemen —visitors for Mrs Fane—in the drawing-room.'

'Have you their cards, Jane?' And when the servant had produced those vouchers of respectability, Mrs Owen read their inscriptions with evident dissatisfaction.

'Mr Laurence Fane.'

'Mr George West.'

'Her husband and her brother! And nothing but cold meat to set before them. How very provoking. Do they look as if they were going to stay, Jane?'

'I'm sure I don't know, ma'am—only I heard one of the gentlemen say to the other that it was awful hot, and they musn't go back till it was cooler.'

'And that, of course, means "dinner." Why couldn't they let me know beforehand?'

'Go down and say I will be with them directly. Stay. Where is Mrs Fane?'

'In the back garden, ma'am, playing croquet with Miss Hill.'

'Give the gentlemen my message, and then take those cards out to Miss Hill. Now, don't forget.'

'I don't like cousin Bellew's reticence on the subject, and I hate mysteries of all kinds,' thought the lady as her handmaid disappeared, 'but I DO like Mary Hill, and if meeting Mr Fane is to get her into any trouble she sha'n't meet him. I only hope it won't enter into his head to look out of the back drawing-room window before she knows that he is there.'

But, as it happened, it *had* entered his head. The day was unusually warm for spring, the railway journey had been hot and dusty, and the small drawing-room, full of furniture, felt close and uninviting. It was a relief to him to go to the open window that afforded a view of the back

garden, where a large lawn, shaded by trees, seemed by comparison a very paradise.

'Look here, Fane,' exclaimed George West, as he regarded it. 'This appears to be a very jolly place. Why, isn't that poor Daisy on the lawn playing with the croquet balls?'

'Yes, that is she, poor darling!' replied Fane, in a low voice.

The men stood side by side and watched her silently. This was the first time George had seen his unfortunate sister since her recovery, and the sight awoke his bitterest recollection. What a wreck she looked as she moved listlessly about the grass, knocking the coloured balls without any apparent aim or intention.

'Is it *possible?*' said George, at length, beneath his breath. 'I can hardly realize that that is Daisy. What a plump girl she used to be, and how full of life! And now—why, she is a mere skeleton, and her hair is almost white. Poor child! Poor child!'

'If you please, sir, Mrs Owen's compliments, and she'll be down directly,' said the voice of Jane at the door.

'Very good,' replied Fane, mechanically.

'That's Mrs Fane a playing at croquet in the back garden, sir,' continued Jane, doing the honours of the establishment. 'Shall I take the little girl out to have a game along with her?'

'Would you like to go in the garden and see the pretty lady, baby?' inquired her father.

Daisy hesitated.

'And pick gooseberries,' continued Jane.

'Yes, I will!' said Daisy, with marvellous promptitude.

'There is no fear, then,' said George, to his brother-in-law, as the child quitted the room.

'What! of Daisy hurting her? Bless you, no! She's as gentle as a dove with the little one. She cried dreadfully, poor girl, at parting with her. I brought the child down on purpose. I expect we shall witness a very excited meeting.'

'Holloa! Who's that girl in black speaking to Daisy now? She must be a nurse. She's got a cap on. What a jolly figure.'

Fane looked up, and started.

'Awfully jolly!' he said, with a sigh. 'Yes, I suppose she must be dear Daisy's attendant. It is a rule of this establishment that Mrs Owen chooses the patients' nurses, so old Honeywood only stayed a few hours to see her patient comfortably settled. She told me the new nurse was a very pretty young woman.'

They watched Jane, as she led the little Daisy, pass on to the lawn, and, approaching the woman in black, speak a few words to her, and place the cards in her hand. At the same moment the child recognized the 'pretty lady' who had played with her in the house in London, and fearlessly flew into her embrace. The 'pretty lady,' on her side, was no less delighted.

'Little cousin Rita,' she exclaimed aloud, as she knelt down to receive the child in her arms,

'have you come from heaven? I have waited here a long time for you to play with me, and my angel said that you would come some day. Where is my angel?' she continued, as she rose to her feet, and looked all round the garden.

'She'll be back directly, ma'am,' said the servant who had remained in attendance.

'Do you hear her?' whispered Fane to West.

'Distinctly! But what has become of the woman in black? She has totally disappeared.'

'Mrs Owen sent for her, most likely. The girl gave her a message. Look at Daisy. Is it not pretty to see her with the child? How she caresses it—sometimes I think that if her own child had lived, perhaps this would never have been.'

At this moment Mrs Owen entered, with many apologies for having kept them waiting.

'But, to tell you the truth, Mr Fane, I thought you would have written before you came.'

'I owe you a thousand apologies, Mrs Owen.

I remember now I ought to have done so, but Mrs Fane's brother, who came up to town to-day, was so anxious to see her that I proposed to bring him down to Sevenoaks at once. It is entirely my fault.'

Mrs Owen was a gentlewoman, and therefore it was not long before she had set them both at their ease again.

'We have been watching my poor sister play at croquet,' observed George West. 'She seems perfectly happy. It is almost a pleasure to see her.'

'At croquet!' exclaimed Mrs Owen, with a quick look of alarm, as she advanced to his side. 'Ah, is that your little girl, Mr Fane?'

'That is my little daughter.'

'She is very like her mother.'

'Mrs Fane is not her mother,' interposed Laurence,—and there, at a look from George, he stopped short.

'Oh—indeed!' said Mrs Owen, drily, and

at the incredulous tone of her voice he made a worse blunder.

'She is my child by my second wife.'

'Your *second* wife?'

'I mean my first wife, of course. What can I have been thinking of?'

'You have been married but a very short time then to the present Mrs Fane?'

'Oh, very short!'

But Mrs Owen remembered Dr Bellew's account of his patient having lost her senses seven years before, and did not believe a word her guest had said.

'May we go into the garden?' inquired George West suddenly. 'I should like to see if my poor sister recognizes me.'

'Certainly! Allow me to show you the way,' replied Mrs Owen as she led them to the back of the house.

'You put your foot in it nicely,' whispered George to Laurence as they followed her.

'I know I did! For heaven's sake say no more about it. I have completely lost my character as it is.'

Daisy did not appear at all shy at the advent of strangers, but neither did she evince any interest at their appearance. She was completely engrossed with the little child.

'Do you know who this is, Mrs Fane?' said Mrs Owen as she advanced to her with Laurence. But even the poor girl's unreasonable antipathy had faded from her mind, and she regarded him with the most perfect indifference.

'Little cousin Rita has come to play with me,' she said in answer, 'and we don't want any more people here. Father says we may have some apples out of the loft, and we are going to make a feast on the top of the straw in the great barn, and play at husband and wife. Rita shall be the husband because she is the tallest and I will be the wife, and we will build a house with rooms and have breakfast together.'

'Her thoughts are running on the old days,' remarked George, with the tears in his eyes, 'when she and Rita were constant playfellows.'

The sound of his voice seemed to strike her, for she immediately mentioned his name.

'Don't let George marry Rita,' she said plaintively. 'Rita belongs to me. I cannot part with Rita. Tell the spirit so.'

When no one appeared to put her request into execution she rose to her feet and looked around the garden piteously.

'Where is my spirit? Harm will come to me if she goes away. Oh, bring her back! Let me go to her. A guardian angel must never go out of sight, or harm will come. Let us look for her together,' she continued, as she seized her brother by the hand, and tried to drag him away.

Mrs Owen appeared anxious.

'Don't let her tease you, Mr West. It is only her fancy. She will worry you terribly if you listen to her.'

'No indeed, I should like to humour her.'

'Come and search for the guardian spirit,' repeated Daisy.

'Let me go too,' said Laurence Fane.

'Mr Fane,' interposed Mrs Owen quickly, 'might I ask for a few minutes' private conversation with you? I have much to tell you about your wife, and should like to hear all your wishes concerning her. Jane,' she added with sundry winks at the domestic, 'take care where Mrs Fane goes, and don't let her worry that gentleman too much.'

She had obtained her object in diverting the attention of Laurence Fane for the present from that part of the garden where she believed Mary Hill to have concealed herself, but the moment she was out of sight and hearing, the cunning, which supplies the place of reason to so many mad people, came to Daisy's aid, and thwarted her design.

'I am cold,' she said, shivering. 'I am very, very cold.'

'Can't you fetch this lady a shawl?' asked George of the little maid.

Jane looked all round the garden before she answered 'Yes! if you'll be sure not to leave her a minute, sir,' and then darted into the house the back way.

'Come!' cried Daisy, eagerly, as soon as ever she had disappeared. 'Come quickly, both of you, and I will show you my guardian angel. They keep her in a black dress down here,' she added mysteriously, 'because *his* wings are not yet grown long enough to fly back to me, but under it she has wings of silver, feathered with gold, and at night when all is dark and everything is still, she comes to me in a flame of glory with a crown upon her head.'

'And what is your spirit's name, dear?' said George, willing to follow her caprice.

'They call her Mary,' she replied, 'but her real name is Love—Love weeps sometimes, but it is only that my wings may grow the faster, and

when they are the same size as his own we are to fly away together and find *him.* This way, this way,' she continued, excitedly, as she pushed open a door that led into the kitchen garden—'this is where my angel hides herself,' and before she had time even to turn her head away, George West found himself face to face with—*Mary Hill!*

CHAPTER XIX.

A NEW HOPE.

NOTWITHSTANDING Mrs Owen's fears for the credit of her capabilities of house-keeping, the two young men refused to put them to the test by staying to dinner, but after accepting some slight refreshment for the child, returned to London by the first train that was convenient. They felt indeed that there was nothing to stay for. Having seen Daisy, and assured themselves she had every comfort she was capable of enjoying, it was only pain to watch her vacant countenance and listless movements, and feel that between their minds and hers evermore there was a great gulf fixed. Laurence, indeed, would have remained until the evening, but

George appeared to find the sight of his sister too much for him, and was quite earnest in his entreaties that they should get back to town as soon as possible. And even when they were in the train his short answers and abstracted manner showed how great an effect the visit had had upon him.

'I don't think she could be placed with a more suitable guardian,' remarked Fane, alluding to his wife.

'No.'

'She appears to have everything she can require?'

'Yes.'

'And to be as happy as is possible under the circumstances?'

'Yes.'

'But now I come to think of it, I did not see her attendant—I mean the young woman in the black dress who was playing with her on the lawn. Did you see her, George?'

'Yes.'

'I'm glad of that. Mrs Owen said she was a very trustworthy and capable person, but I forgot to ask to speak to her. Did she appear pleasant?'

'Yes.'

'Where did you meet her?'

'In the garden.'

'Daisy too see mamma,' interposed the child.

'My poor lamb! what are you dreaming of?' said her father, sadly.

'I *did* see my mamma, with Uncle George, in the garden.'

'Don't chatter so,' said her uncle, brusquely. 'She's thinking of poor Daisy,' he continued, to Laurence. 'There *is* a great likeness.'

'What, *now?* None surely that a child would recognize. I wonder what the imp means?'

'It *was* my mamma, Uncle George, and she kissed me, and cried,' said Daisy, with a severe correction.

'Of course she did, dear, and she carried little Daisy about in her arms and let her play with the croquet balls,' replied George West. 'Let the child fancy it was her mother if she likes,' he continued in a lower tone to Laurence.

'It is strange she should make such a mistake,' said his companion, with a sigh.

'Mamma had a black dress on, and she cried,' reiterated '*L'enfant terrible.*'

'Surely Daisy was dressed in blue,' exclaimed her father, quickly.

'My dear Fane! what do you suppose that brat knows about dresses? You let her chatter far too much. She has all the conversation to herself, it strikes me. How are the market prices to-day? I shall have to do a little business before I return to Bushthorne.'

And in the desultory talk that ensued concerning the peace and politics, the father's attention was completely diverted from the allusions made by his little child.

* * * * *

When they arrived at Fane's house in town they heard that Dr Bellew had called and left word that he would look in again in the evening.

'Some new idea about poor Daisy, I suppose,' remarked Fane, wearily.

'Well, I shall leave you to talk it over with the doctor alone,' replied his brother-in-law. 'I have several letters to write, and would rather sleep at my hotel. I shall see you again to-morrow, Fane. Good night.' And before Fane could remonstrate with him, he was gone.

Dr Bellew did not come in till late, and then his first inquiry was, where Laurence had been that day.

'Down to Sevenoaks! How scared you look at the intelligence. It's the first time I've been there.'

'Did you send word of your intention previously?'

'No! I did not, I'm sorry to say. But George

West came up to town unexpectedly and wished to see his sister, so we went down together. All right. Mrs Owen was as jolly and as nice as could be, and we found the poor child as well as usual, and apparently happy.'

'Ah——' ejaculated the doctor, drawing a long breath as though he were relieved. 'She has a good nurse, I know, for I recommended her to Mrs Owen.'

'So I heard. But I didn't see the nurse, she was busy or something. She seems to make Daisy comfortable, and that is the great point.'

'Exactly so. And now to business. I came to speak to you, Mr Fane, to-day, upon a very important matter. You have heard of Sir Wilfrid James——'

'The great brain doctor? Certainly.'

'I took him to Sevenoaks last week to hold a consultation on Mrs Fane.'

'How strange Mrs Owen never mentioned it.'

'I cautioned her not to do so until she had

leave from me. Sir Wilfrid has seen Mrs Fane altogether three times. He has thoroughly and carefully examined her, and his opinion is, that her aberration of intellect is caused by the pressure on the brain of some particle of skull, brought about, as the seaman described to you, by a heavy blow or fall.'

'Yes—yes——'

'Pray don't get so excited, or I shall not consider myself justified in imparting Sir Wilfrid's further opinion, which is conditional, mind you, on the success of a most delicate and difficult operation. Sir Wilfrid is of opinion, Mr Fane, that this operation of lifting the broken particle off the brain *successfully performed* will restore the reason of your wife, but it must rest with you to decide whether it shall be undertaken or not.'

'And if it is not successful?'

'We hope it will be. But in all operations there is a risk. The operations of the brain especially so. If it is not successful, it will *not* be

successful! That is all I can tell you, Mr Fane.'

'You mean that it will kill her,' he said, bitterly.

'Not necessarily so. But, on the other hand, I must warn you that if this operation—which may preserve both her life and her reason—is *not* performed, Mrs Fane cannot last many months longer. The pressure is increasing daily.'

'My poor girl!' exclaimed Laurence, bringing his face into his hands.

'Try and look at the more cheerful side of the picture, Mr Fane. Your wife is young, and Sir Wilfrid has great hopes of her. She may be restored to you and to the use of her reason for a long term of years.'

'Is it *possible?*'

'It is more than possible. It is probable. But it lies with you to decide. No doctor will proceed in a case of this kind without the sanction of the nearest relatives of the patient.'

'Do *you* advise it?'

'I do—most cordially. The poor lady's life is useless, at present, either to herself or others, and all that we can do in any case is to act for the best.'

'I must have her father's and brother's consent as well as my own. I would give my fortune to see my wife's reason restored to her—my life in exchange for hers—but this is too important a question to be decided by myself. If her relations wish this operation to be performed, it shall be done.'

'Very good. Then I shall leave you to ascertain their wishes on the subject before I call again.'

* * * * *

The next day Laurence Fane went back to Maple Farm with his brother-in-law, and laid the case before Mr West. The old man's decision and that of his son were unanimous. They considered it was the husband's duty not to leave any means untried by which his wife's reason might be re-

stored to her. They not only advised, but entreated him to put the case unconditionally in the hands of Sir Wilfrid James and Dr Bellew.

'I am very glad to hear you have received such sensible advice,' said the doctor, as it was repeated to him. 'Now I shall proceed to business with a good heart and a clear conscience.'

'When will Sir Wilfrid undertake the operation?'

'As soon as possible. Next week, I hope, if he has no pressing engagements elsewhere. I have been preparing Mrs Fane to undergo it for some time past, for, to tell the truth, it was solely with this intention I persuaded you to send her down to Sevenoaks.'

'You have been very kind to both of us,' replied Fane, pressing his hand. 'You will be sure to let us know exactly when Sir Wilfrid will go down to Rose Bank?'

'Oh, of course. To the very minute.'

'I shall suffer such terrible anxiety till I hear it is well over.'

'Naturally. And perhaps you would wish to be on the spot when it is done?'

'I should like it of all things. If you are sure Sir Wilfrid would not object.'

'Oh, Sir Wilfrid never objects to anything,' observed Dr Bellew, with a comical expression of countenance, as he took his leave.

Nevertheless Laurence Fane was thrown into an unusual state of excitement the following day by receiving a telegram from Sevenoaks, which ran thus:—

'From Dr Bellew, To Laurence Fane,
'Rose Bank. Bayswater.

'Operation performed successfully this morning. Patient weak, but perfectly sensible. Sir Wilfrid in close attendance. Considered it better not to let you know till it was over.'

He could only telegraph back, 'Thank God. Let me hear again this evening,'—and sit down

half stunned with the sudden intelligence, to wonder at his new-found happiness. *Daisy once more in possession of her senses!* He had been accustomed for so long to consider her incurable that he could not realize the change. Daisy—able to speak coherently—to recognize him as her husband—to fly to his arms and nestle in his embrace as of old. His thoughts wandered back to the happy season when he had first called her his wife, and brought her home to the little house at Notting-hill, where their baby had been born, and they had lived a life of perfect love and confidence, until the cruel fate that had for awhile ruined his professional career and driven him forth from England, clouded his existence by the belief that he had lost her. He thought of the shy, blushing face, wet with tears, that had been raised to answer his question in the old-fashioned arbour at Maple Farm—of the clinging trust with which she had gone forth to brave the world with him—of the meek devotion which had made her leave

her own friends without a murmur and prepare to accompany him to Australia—and above all of the sweet, frightened eyes that had gazed into his as he lowered her, on that last fearful night, into the cruel boat which had separated their souls from then till now.

He thought of all this—and a new hope springing up within his breast made his face flush and his limbs tremble as he paced up and down his library floor. He did not stay to consider that the bleached hair could never more be turned to ruddy brown; that the wasted hands and arms would in all probability never regain the smooth firm plumpness that had once so much delighted him; that the mind, wrecked for such an interval, was very unlikely to become strong and energetic, and fit for serious work again.

He dreamed of Daisy, his first love, his first wife, as he had parted with her; and revelled in wild imagination of the future until he almost felt her arms tight about his neck, and her warm

breath heralding the advent of her sweet girlish lips. He dreamed of her less as a wife, perhaps, than as of some dear child to be cherished and thought for, who was coming home to give him a fresh interest in life, and to turn that empty, desolate house once more into a haven of refuge for his weary spirit.

He was dreaming still—excited, expectant, almost happy—when the second telegram was put into his hand—

'Consciousness continues, but symptoms have changed for the worse. Come down to Rose Bank by the first train.'

CHAPTER XX.

THEIR GOOD ANGEL.

IT was past eleven o'clock at night when Laurence Fane received this message, but he caught the last train from Charing Cross, and found himself at Sevenoaks an hour after. A fly had been sent to meet him at the station. He felt from that circumstance that all hope was over. He was met in the hall at Rose Bank by Mrs Owen and a dignified-looking middle-aged gentleman.

'Sir Wilfrid James,' she said, as she introduced them to one another. 'Sir Wilfrid's carriage is in attendance to take him back to town at once, Mr Fane. He has only waited to speak a few words to you first.'

'Never mind explanations, or regrets, or any-

thing of that kind,' exclaimed the young man passionately, as he followed the physician into the sitting-room. 'I am prepared for the worst you may tell me. I know that she is dead.'

'You are mistaken,' said Sir Wilfrid, gravely. 'Your wife is not dead, Mr Fane, but I cannot conceal from you that she is sinking fast.'

'I guessed it from the telegram.'

'My friend, Dr Bellew, is with her now, and will remain as long as his services are required. All that could possibly be done for her has been done.'

'I am sure of that.'

'She is so young I had great hopes of the operation being entirely successful. And so indeed in one sense it has been. But there was an amount of hidden mischief going on in the system which could not have been foreseen, and which has rendered it quite incapable of resisting so severe a shock. As soon as ever we perceived the result was likely to be fatal we let you know.'

Fane answered nothing. Sir Wilfrid thought he was laying all the blame of his wife's death upon the operation.

'I hope you understand,' he continued gently, 'that this complication of disorders must inevitably have carried off our patient in the course of a short time, and most probably under circumstances of much greater suffering than she endures at present.'

'Does she suffer much?'

'Not at all. The vital powers alone are at fault. She is slipping out of the world like a child going to sleep.'

'Oh, let me go to her.'

'As soon as ever Mrs Owen has prepared her for your presence. Ah, here is Bellew. I may now leave you safely in his hands; good evening, Mr Fane,' and with a word to his brother professional, Sir Wilfrid James passed to his carriage.

'My poor friend,' said Bellew, 'I little

thought I should have occasion to send you such a message as the last!'

'I knew it was not to be prevented,' he murmured in reply.

'It was not only not to be prevented, but not to be foreseen. The operation was most successful (Sir Wilfrid is a marvellous surgeon), but there is extensive disease of the lungs and heart, my dear Fane, and her nervous system has been too much shaken to sustain the shock. I wonder now that she has really survived so long.'

'Does she know I am here? Has she spoken of me?'

'Several times. She will recognize you, I am sure, but do not allude to any past circumstances or facts before her. She is like a person recovering from a severe fever. Her memory is indistinct, and her brain far too feeble to remember. You are sure you can command yourself?'

'Have I not had occasion to learn the lesson?' said Laurence, bitterly.

'I think so, and therefore I am about to trust you further,' continued Dr Bellew, as he got up and closed the door. 'May I ask if you have heard anything lately of—of—Mrs Fane's cousin?'

'Of Margarita? No. Would to God I had. Her own people are almost as obstinate at her continued silence as I am.'

'*I know where she is, Mr Fane.*'

'You know—and you have never told me. How could you be so cruel?'

'Be patient for a moment, and I will tell you. Miss Hay confided her address to me as a secret. I could not have divulged it without breaking my word.'

'And why do you speak of it now?'

'Because she is so near at hand that I am afraid you may encounter her.'

Fane started to his feet in the wildest excitement.

'Margarita near at hand? In this house? Oh, don't tell me that all this misery has driven her mad too.'

'No, no! far from it. She is the wisest and most collected here. But cannot you guess the reason, Fane—the attraction that drew her hither, that she might soothe, as only a woman and sister can—the sad life and last hours of your afflicted wife?'

'God bless her! I might have guessed it,' said Laurence Fane. ''Tis just like Margarita to have thought of it!'

'I know that hitherto her greatest wish has been to avoid meeting you, lest she should either prevent your visiting your wife, or be compelled to leave her to another's care. But now I fear it is unavoidable. Mrs Fane, to whom all through her illness she has been devoted, has recognized her and will not let go of her hand. I perceived this difficulty but just now, and asked Miss Hay how she should surmount it. She answered, "Tell

him I have the courage to meet him and be silent, and I expect him to do no less." '

'She is the most noble-hearted woman that ever breathed,' said Fane.

'And for that reason you will not disappoint her, I am sure. Are you ready to go up to your wife?'

'Yes. But let me go alone.'

'I had no intention of accompanying you. Mrs Owen will show you the way. And I shall be within call, if required.'

Mrs Owen was too delicate to worry the bereaved husband with conversation of any sort, and he followed her up the stairs in silence. His heart beat so fast he could almost hear its palpitations. His mind was so confused he could hardly realize the scene to which he was going. They entered a bed-room, the solitary light in which was so carefully shaded as to envelope the apartment in a seemingly mysterious gloom, and Mrs Owen preceded him to the bed and gazed at its

occupant for some moments in silence. Then she said, very softly,

'Here is your husband, my dear. Would you like to see him?'

'*So much!*' replied a weary voice, and at the sound of it Laurence burned to rush forward and clasp the speaker in his arms.

'You can talk to her now, Mr Fane,' said Mrs Owen, as she drew backward to enable him to advance. He stood as though he were on holy ground. He drew aside the curtains, and saw by the dim light a white, wasted face laid upon the pillow, and two large tired eyes gazing languidly towards him from the midst of it.

'My own Daisy!' was all that he could utter.

'I am so glad that you have come, Laury,' she answered, without the faintest sign of emotion or surprise. 'I have been ill such a long, long time, and now that I am better I feel so sleepy, I was afraid I should not keep awake until you came.'

'You are in no pain, dearest?'

'Oh no! All the pain passed away long ago, and now there is nothing left but peace—perfect peace. Kiss me, dear Laury. We have loved each other so well.'

'We have indeed, my darling,' he said as he bent down to press his lips to hers, 'and we shall never cease to love each other.'

'Never! Our love was once and for always, Laury. It is very sweet to think of—very sweet!'

'She appears to have lost all recollection of the past, and even of the fact that we have been separated,' remarked Fane to Mrs Owen in a whisper, as Daisy's eyes closed and she appeared to have fallen into slumber.

'She has forgotten all but that which appeals to her affections, Dr Bellew says,' replied Mrs Owen, 'and it is a most merciful thing it should be so. I am sure, Mr Fane, that it will be a comfort to you in after life to remember that she knew

nothing of what has proved so great a source of distress to you.'

'I can thank God for it already,' he answered.

'Dear Rita! hold my hand fast,' murmured Daisy, half rousing from her sleep. 'How should I have gone through all this without you?'

The beloved name sounded on Fane's heart with a thrill.

'She alludes to her cousin,' he remarked, in a trembling voice.

'Does she?' said Mrs Owen. 'Perhaps she wanders a little again. I have heard her speak to her attendant, Mary Hill, by that name several times to-day. Mary Hill,' she continued in a lower voice, 'a most excellent young woman, recommended to me by Dr Bellew, is sitting behind the further curtain. You may see that Mrs Fane is holding her hand. She has taken a great fancy to her, and becomes restless as soon as she leaves the room. But if you could prefer her

being sent away just now, I will try to manage it for you.'

For the moment he could not answer. His Margarita, there! close at hand, divided from him only by a wretched strip of damask, and he dare not fly to her, or speak, or show the least emotion.

'Don't trouble yourself,' he managed to blurt out. 'I have nothing to say to my wife that the —the other need not hear.'

'You always liked dear Rita, Laury. She was our good angel, was she not?'

'She was indeed, dear. Heaven bless her for it.'

He turned to the bedside again as he spoke, and saw the hand which was clasped in Daisy's trembling at the sound of his voice.

'Stoop low that I may whisper to you. You never guessed it, but I used to be jealous of death, Laury. I used to think that if he came to me before he came to you, that you might learn to

love Rita as well as you did me. But that is all gone now, all gone! And when I go to sleep, remember that I said so!'

'Do you feel sleepy, dearest?'

'Very sleepy. The room keeps turning round and round and my eyelids are so heavy. But I have had a glorious dream, Laury, and I don't care now how soon it comes.'

'What was your dream, dear love?'

'I thought that wandering through this world we had lost each other, and you were very lonely without me. You sat and cried, Laury, and I saw your tears, and stretched my arms towards you, and called you by your name, but you could not hear my voice, nor could I make one step towards you. Then as we were both most miserable, I saw dear Rita come like a good angel to our aid, and she soothed your grief and brought us together again, and re-united us in heaven for ever—for ever.'

'It was a lovely dream, my darling. It has

come true. If Margarita had not found you for me, we might never have met again.'

'And when I go she will watch over you. Dear Rita! How I love her! Now I shall sleep in peace.'

Mrs Owen came up to the bedside, looked for a moment at the dying woman's face out of which the light of life was slowly flickering, laid her fingers on her pulse, and quietly left the room in search of Dr Bellew.

'Rita! dear Rita! I want you,' murmured Daisy.

'Margarita, we want you,' echoed Laurence, in a voice that was trembling with suppressed energy and passion.

She drew the curtain on one side and leaned over the prostrate form.

'Here I am, Daisy. What can I do for you, darling?'

'Love him, Rita! Take care of him! Be his

comfort and his joy that he may never miss me when I am gone.'

'I could not but miss you, my own,' said Laurence, brokenly.

'But she has been so good to me, Laury!—so careful—so tender. She has been so good to both of us. She is our guardian angel.'

'You were my light and my life,' he cried.

'But the light is fading fast, love, and the life will soon be over. I know what sleep means now—rest and heaven.'

'Oh, Daisy, think how long we have been parted—stay a little, now you are come to me once more.'

'Rita—will—stay,' said Daisy, gaspingly, 'and—love you—better—than I ever did.'

Laurence did not answer, but his sad eyes rolled upwards to meet Margarita's, and ask if she endorsed the promise. But hers were fixed upon her dying cousin.

'Rita, give me your hand,' said Daisy, presently.

'My darling, here it is—close in your own.'

'Not that. The—other—hand. Now, Laury—yours. So—close together—on my heart—Now I can sleep in comfort.'

With a last feeble effort she drew their hands towards her, and laid them, one above the other, on her heart—then closed her eyes, and went to sleep—in this world—for ever.

They watched the feeble breath desert her lips—the weak mouth relax its muscles—the grey, unmistakeable shade of death creep softly, like an evening cloud, about her delicate features—and wept above her with clasped hands—and not one thought but was all loyal to the soul that had just left them.

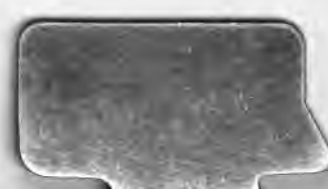
The first thing that recalled Fane to himself was Margarita's gentle touch upon his bowed and stricken head.

'Laurence,' she said solemnly, 'she has at

least died happy. Think what it might have been if we had never found her.'

'Or if I had never found you,' he returned passionately. 'Oh, my good angel! Our angel! Say that you will return once more to fulfil this innocent child's dream. That you will come to be again my comfort and my joy, that I may never miss the treasure God has taken from me.'

'I *will* come, my dearest,' was all she answered, but on that word Laurence Fane knew he could rely as certainly as though it had been spoken by an angel from heaven instead of an angel upon earth.

THE END.

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